ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A MANIFESTATION OF THE JANUS MYTH

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A. Introduction

Among the issues one finds in the contemporary literature surrounding American public administration, few recur as frequently and with as much prominence as "accountability." Accountability is one of that small number of concepts (e.g., bureaucracy, efficiency, responsibility) that constantly draws the attention of students, commentators, practitioners, and scholars of public administration. But in a sense accountability is in a class by itself, for its meaning, applications, and implications touch on each of the others in some critical way.

Ironically, the frequent use of the term in discussions of government operations is often a sign of concern among observers that there is a lack of accountability in the political system. The Watergate affair opened the floodgates and released nearly fifteen years of stored-up concern about the accountability of the U.S. presidency. What the presidency went through after Nixon's resignation, the U.S. bureaucracy goes through at least once each decade at all levels of government. The Grace Commission[1] is but the latest and most visible example in a long line of critical official reports and media exposes that have stimulated intense, but typically short lived, concern for accountability in American public administration.

Those critical examinations of the administrative operations have set the tone for the discussion of government accountability in the United States. The underlying message of each study is that accountability is low or nonexistent among America's civil servants, and that only through reorganization and reform can the public sector's bureaucracy be brought under control. As a result of this pervasive orientation and the attitudes it promotes, most studies of accountability in public administration tend to be reactive, normative, and prescriptive. They tend to be reactive responses to some scandal or study that is exposed (and exploited) by the media or some politician; they tend to be normative refutations of undemocratic government behavior or inefficiencies in public programs; and, in the tradition of the famous Friedrich-Finer debates of the 1940s[2], they tend to prescribe the means and methods for achieving greater accountability for American public administration.

In this paper we emphasize a different approach, one built on the idea that accountability is a fact of administrative life for American public administrators rather than a condition that needs to be developed. Our purpose is to posit a framework for analyzing extant types of accountability and to examine three case studies that indicate whether a useful research agenda for the study of administrative accountability can be established based on those initial applications. We begin by defining accountability and briefly examining its "dualistic" existence in the American cultural context. Next we describe two schools of thought on the subject, the political which emphasizes regime values and the managerial which stresses performance values. Drawing on those perspectives, we describe a framework for analyzing accountability in American public administration and examine four major "accountability systems" that emerge from the dimensions of that framework. Several initial questions concerning accountability are generated, and these are applied in case studies that reflect the issues raised by the concept of accountability. A final discussion summarizes both the findings of that case study application and the implications of taking this approach to the study of accountability in American public administration.

B. Defining Accountability

The search for a definition of accountability is not as frustrating as the search for meanings of other frequently used terms. The definitions available to us, however, cover a wide range of perspectives on the topic. In the classic Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson textbook it was defined in a way that stressed the existence of preconditions for accountability: "those methods, procedures, and forces that determine what values will be reflected in administrative decisions."[3] In a more recent work, E. Leslie Normanton highlights the view of accountability as an ongoing responsibility imposed on the accountable agency or individual: "a liability to reveal, to explain and to justify what one does; how one discharges responsibilities . .

in the hands of the accountable party, but in a different -- and much more political -- way: the "extent to which an organization believes that it is answerable for its actions to the people it serves."[5] Ira Sharkansky is much more explicit in noting the linkage between accountability and politics when he argues that the issue of accountability "gets at the question of control, or ~~Who rules~~."[6] Finally, there are those who define the term to include the "means" associated with accountability: "any situation in which individuals who exercise power are expected to be constrained and in fact are reasonably constrained by external means . . . and to a degree by internal norms. . . ."[7]

Perhaps even more useful than these single-sentence definitions of accountability are discussions which elaborate the concepts in terms of various "types." Here too there exists a range of approaches, each highlighting a distinct perspective on the subject. Herbert J. Spiro, a political theorist, views accountability as one dimension of the more general concept of "responsibility." In dealing with responsibility, he makes a distinction between an official being accountable for an event and being the cause of the occurrence. Regardless of whether the official actually caused the event -- made it happen either intentionally or unintentionally -- he or she may still be held accountable for it. For Spiro, accountability is synonymous with answerability. Given this orientation, he discusses two types of accountability: explicit and implicit. Explicit accountability exists when the official is aware of the extent to which he or she must answer for an action, while for implicit accountability such knowledge is lacking.[8]

Social theorist Amitai Etzioni takes a functionalist approach to the concept when he posits four alternative conceptions of accountability. The first he terms accountability as "gesture" or symbol. "The hallmark of accountability as gesture is that it is pure norm with little or no instrumentality attached." In this sense, accountability stands as a "substitute for actual accountability" or as a means for mobilizing or educating populations regarding government's responsibilities in some controversial area, e.g. civil rights.[9] In Etzioni's second conception of accountability, it is regarded as a reflection and product of the political process wherein the accountable official is exposed to the dynamics of interest group politics in a pluralistic system. In this form of accountability, the official's position "is analogous to that of a billiard ball in a physics diagram upon which various forces impinge."[10] The third type of accountability is formal and legalistic, a type similar to Spiro's "explicit" accountability to the extent that "much ink is shed" to clarify to whom and for what the official is accountable.[11] Finally, Etzioni argues for a fourth version accountability, one that provides the official with "guidance" in carrying out his or her task that goes beyond symbolism, politics, and the formal obligations of the law.[12]

A third typology has emerged from the observations of those who track the accountability of public officials -- "accountants" and "auditors" in both the narrowest and broadest senses of those terms. David Z. Robinson outlines three types of accountability derived from the activities of those oversight professionals. Program accountability focuses on the degree to which a public official is fulfilling his or her program or project goals, however these may be defined. Process accountability focuses on "how" the official is attempting to achieve those goals. Finally, fiscal accountability deals almost exclusively with how the official is implementing one salient part of the process, the expenditure of funds.[13]

We get a sense of what accountability entails from these various definitions and typologies, but analytically they leave a great deal to be desired. No doubt, much insight has been gained from the specific case examples those authors have provided to elaborate on their conceptions of accountability. Nevertheless, there still remains the task of developing a framework within which the conditions and dynamics of accountability can be systematically studied. Accomplishing that task for the study of public administration will be challenging but not analytically impossible, for there exists a considerable collection of useful material ready to be used for such a purpose. What is missing, however, is the proper "attitude" among those who study public administration toward accountability. As noted above, accountability is currently approached in reactive, normative, and prescriptive terms by most students of government administration. What is needed at the outset is to establish an attitude which stresses the current state of accountability in American public administration. To accomplish that objective, we begin by describing accountability within the American context.

Context is important in the study of accountability. Neither the U.S. nor modern democratic nations has a monopoly on the concept of accountability or its application. Even the most despotic of dictators will claim to be accountable to someone or something (e.g. God, history, the "nation"). In fact, variations in how accountability is perceived and applied may be at the heart of differences among national political systems. There can be little doubt that accountability is viewed differently in the U.S. than it is perceived in the U.S.S.R. or Iran. But it is no less the case that differences in conceptions of accountability exist between the U.S. and Great Britain.[14] When all is said and done, therefore, any discussion of accountability must be built on an understanding of the particular context in which it is applied.

The American context for public administration accountability can be summarized in a variety of ways. The general distrust of government and the highly fragmented structure of political institutions are two of the more obvious features of the system. There is perhaps no more central and relevant feature for the issue of public administration accountability than the long-standing distinction between politics and administration. Whether or not the distinction exists in fact, it is an important factor in determining how people view the roles and obligations of government administrators. The politics/administration dichotomy manifests itself as a dual set of standards upon which the form and dynamics of public administration accountability are built. Political and managerial standards for accountability are articulated separately and often applied without reference to each other. Nevertheless, those standards inevitably interact, and it is in those interactions that the actual dimensions of public administration accountability become evident. Any framework for the study of accountability must take that interactive dualism into account.

Given this perspective, we advocate the imagery of the Janus Myth in order to facilitate a better understanding of accountability in public administration as well as other aspects of American bureaucracy. Janus, the ancient Roman god of doorposts, was a two-faced figure that was often found above city gates and entryways to Roman homes. Janus bid farewell to those leaving a place and greeted those who entered. Strategically, Janus was in a position to view the world from both within and outside the confines of a city or home. Functionally, he simultaneously represented both the separation and linkage between internal household matters and external worldly affairs. As an appropriate image for American public administration, the Janus Myth stresses the distinction between political and managerial concerns while drawing attention to the interdependencies of the two. From our perspective, accountability for American public administrators is reflected in the Janus Myth imagery, for it is a manifestation of both political and managerial conceptions of accountability that have emerged over the past two centuries.

C. Two Views of Accountability

In political terms, the question of accountability for public administration draws attention to how one links the tasks of administration to America's regime values. As John A. Rohr has noted in his discussion of administrative ethics, "to the extent that bureaucrats govern in a democratic polity, they should somehow reflect the values of the people in whose name they govern."[15] What are those regime values? They include many of the enduring values associated with the American Revolution as well as those developed as part of the American political culture for the past two centuries. They also include less permanent values that take the form of ideological commitments. In the broadest sense, they make up what Samuel P. Huntington has described as "the American Creed." In a narrower sense they are reflected in the ideological commitments of those who are elected to public office.

The American Creed has been studied and described by many analysts, and while each has used a different set of terms to label these values, there is little doubt that they have all been discussing the same thing. Louis Hartz found them in tenets of an "irrational" Lockean liberalism[16]; Daniel Boorstin saw them in the continuity of past values reflected in our contemporary institutions[17]; Walter Lippmann perceived them as the endangered "public philosophy" of western democracies[18]; and William H. Riker saw them in the "democratic dogma" toward which Americans strive.[19] On a more explicit level, Seymour Martin Lipset has posited "equality and achievement" as the "two basic American values" around which the nation has developed.[20] Huntington's list is a bit more extensive: "liberty, equality, individualism, democracy, and the rule of law under a constitution."[21]

On an ideological level, American politics generates variations on the American Creed that tend to place different emphasis on basic regime values. For example, accepting Lipset's view of American values for the moment, one can argue that the current administration in Washington stresses "achievement" while the prior one focused on issues of "equality." Although American politics tends not to be ideological, specific political orientations -- all variations of the American Creed -- tend to dominate at any given time.[22]

Within the context of the American Creed and its ideological variations, public administration accountability takes the form of a commitment to have administrative duties fulfilled in a manner consistent with both the tenets of the general creed and its particular political manifestations. Public administrators are thus expected to perform in ways that do not violate (or which promote) liberty, equality, individualism, etc.. On specific issues, they are expected to carry out their tasks in light of the views of the current political leadership. In short, the political concept of accountability places a premium on adherence to politically derived or driven forces.

In light of these political expectations, the problem of accountability becomes one of establishing the means and mechanisms for making certain the public administrators are in fact fulfilling the objectives of the American Creed or the current political leadership. Although the debate over the proper means and mechanisms has been wide ranging and extremely suggestive, much of it can be reduced to the positions taken by Friedrich and Finer in their classic exchange, i.e. those favoring internal controls versus those favoring external mechanisms. On the one extreme, the internalists believe that one can rely primarily on education, training, socialization, professionalization, and similar methods to instill the appropriate values and political sensitivities within the administrator that are needed to produce the desired results. On the other extreme, externalists believe that only through constant and thorough oversight by outside actors can one be certain that political expectations are being met. In either case, the debate in political accountability focuses attention on the forms of control imposed on American public administrators.

From the managerial perspective, accountability for public administrators is intended to make certain they adhere to the performance values of American society. The management orientation is almost an obsession with Americans, particularly as it promises greater efficiency in government. "In America efficiency is the fetish of the business world," observes Abraham Kaplan, "and the operation of a business the model for politics and personal life."[23] The urge for the business-like operation of government was at the heart of the major political and administrative reforms that have provided us with our modern forms of public administration at all levels of our political system,[24] and it was the essential theme underlying Woodrow Wilson's call to study government administration in 1887.[25]

While efficiency stands as the central performance value in this view of accountability, it is not the only one stressed. Effectiveness, or goal achievement, is another frequently emphasized value upon which managerial accountability is built,[26] as is the idea of "economy" in government.[27] The tendency to give high priority to these managerial criteria has been both criticized and praised,[28] but in no case has anyone denied their practical importance for public administration accountability in the United States. "The promise of business administration is almost irresistible to the American electorate," states Kaplan; the "plain man will stand for no nonsense: he wants the most for his money."[29]

In contrast to the political accountability stress on forms of control, managerial accountability concentrates attention on the degree of control had by those to whom administrators are accountable.[29] As in the political conception of accountability, there exists a wide ranging debate over what accountability should entail. At one extreme are those who believe the degree of control should be high in the sense of being comprehensive (covering all aspects of administration in detail), thorough, and constant[30]; at the other extreme are those who believe in a low degree of managerial control, allowing administrators a great deal more autonomy and discretion in carrying out their functions.[31] In one sense, this is but another dimension of the Friedrich-Finer debate over administrative responsibility and a more general manifestation of the classic "Theory X versus Theory Y" model posited by Douglas McGregor. In another sense, it is a managerial version of the general debate over the role of administrative discretion in the American constitutional system.[32] Regardless of its source, the concern for managerial accountability plays a major role in discussions about American public administration.[33]

D. The Framework

Given these two views of accountability, our task is to construct a framework that will be useful in analyzing the role accountability plays in American public administration. Such a framework should highlight the overlapping themes of both the political and managerial views of accountability outlined above. These are reflected in the two major dimensions of Figure 1. On the horizontal dimension is the dichotomy symbolic of the range of choices characterizing the debate over political accountability, i.e. whether control over accountable officials should be internal or external in form. Along the vertical dimension is a second dichotomy indicating the range of options that emerge from discussions of managerial accountability, i.e. a high degree of control versus a low degree of control over accountable officials.

Within this framework four common types of public administration accountability can be distinguished. We contend that each of these four types can exist and be found acceptable in the American political system. They represent models of alternative <u>accountability systems</u> that might be applied to public administrators within specific jurisdiction and organizational contexts. However, it should be noted at the outset that our claims for these four accountability systems are tentative and limited. At the moment they represent analytic idealizations drawn from the logic of the Janus Myth theme outlined earlier. The test of any such analytic model is in its application to the reality it is supposed to provide insight into.

LOCUS OF FORM OF CONTROL

DEGREE OF CONTROL	Internal	External
High	COMMAND	OVERSIGHT
Low	RESPONSIBLE	RESPONSIVE

FIGURE 1
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Where the degree of control over public administrators is high and the form of control internal we have a <u>command accountability system</u>. Perhaps the best known example of this approach to accountability is found in the idea of the "Administrative Presidency" associated with the Nixon administration,[34] but its federal history goes back to efforts at reorganizing the federal executive branch from the Brownlow Committee onward. Underlying this approach is the classical assumption that accountability is facilitated by centralizing administrative responsibility through establishing a unity of hierarchical command. Under this system, it is the chief executive official of an agency who is accountable for the activities of his or her organization and its members. As the accountable party, it follows that he or she will develop appropriate mechanisms for defining and monitoring the relevant behaviors of organizational subordinates. Taken in its most extreme form, this accountability system promotes an authoritarian style of management in which much time and energy is devoted to making certain every detail of agency operations is going "just right."[35]

Where the degree of accountability control remains high, but the form of that control derives from external (outside the agency or organization) sources, we have an oversight accountability system. The most relevant model or example is again federal, but this time it is found in the relationship between Congress and the bureaucracy. While Congress does not have the direct power to command federal agencies, it does have considerable leverage over federal administrators through a number of oversight mechanisms. Although Congress has generally neglected is functions in this area, it does have the capacity to establish an effective system of accountability based on its powers to create, fund, make requests of (i.e. casework), audit, and investigate the work of government administrators.[36] But legislatures are not the only external source for oversight accountability. Any entity or group having "sovereign" status relative to the bureaucracy can approach accountability through oversight. One can see this kind of accountability style as an alternative for Presidents who seek to avoid taking "command," and one can argue that just such an approach characterizes the Reagan presidency.[37] In certain policy arenas (e.g., school segregation, environmental protection), the courts can be regarded as participating in a form of oversight accountability.[38] Even private groups which claim to represented the public interest or common good can develop a role in this type of accountability system.[39]

Responsible accountability systems combine a low degree of control based on internal mechanisms. It is in this area that the issues surrounding administrative ethics and accountability merge.[40] Underlying this system is a trust in the expertise and sense of obligation of the public administrator. It is a trust built on the belief that public administration accountability can be instilled through education, training, experience, and commitments to both the public interest and professionalism. Particular stress is placed on the administrator's professionalism, and in many cases that means deferring to that official's understanding of what his or her professionally defined obligations are. On a political level, this form of accountability takes the form of electing a Burkean "trustee" -- someone who you trust to apply sound judgement and appropriate moral standards on all policy matters. You do not count on that individual to legislate in your particular interest, but rather in the interest of the community at-large as he or she sees it. Similarly, we often appoint government administrators who we believe will act responsibly on behalf of the community's interests, and under this system we hold him or her accountable on that grounds alone.

Finally, where external control mechanisms dominate but with a low degree of control being exercised over the accountable official, we have a responsive accountability system. This is an approach described and admired by pluralists, for it presents the picture of government administrators being accountable to those they serve or some other group with a special interest in the work of the public agency.[41] Other observers such as Theodore J. Lowi and Peter Navarro have expressed serious reservations about the value of such a system.[42] In either case, there can be no doubt about the popularity of this accountability system within specific policy arenas, e.g. agriculture, defense contracting, etc..

E. Multiple Accountability Systems: Illustrations from the Council-Manager Form of Government

In the cases presented below we illustrate those various types of accountability and the potential for the different types to work both together and at cross purposes to each other. We choose the council-manager form of government for our illustrations because in its idealized form its administrative structure is fertile ground for the various types of accountability. In many respects, the council-manager form of government is a real-world embodiment of the politics/administration dichotomy.[43] It incorporates the dual needs of local government units for political responsiveness to local interests and managerial expertise in the administration of that responsiveness.

At its best, the council-manager form of government reflects a balance between the ideals of political responsiveness and professional management. When it is working effectively, the various types of accountability it involves will be complementary, constituting an overall framework for the pursuit of the public agenda. Under the system elected local officials (the council members) are held accountable for making policy decisions and for hiring the city manager. The city manager is the top appointive official in the city and as such is held accountable for the execution of the policy mandates of the council and the day-to-day management of the city.

At first glance, accountability issues seem to be fairly straightforward under the council-manager form of government.

Actually, accountability is complicated in form and its dynamics is sometimes difficult to predict. As generally structured, elected officials do not concern themselves with day-to-day administrative details, such as individual personnel decisions relating to hiring, salaries, or promotions; instead, they concern themselves with broader policy issues which relate to personnel, such as budgetary allocations for hiring, raises, and so on. In performing these tasks, the council may operate as if it were under either a responsive or oversight system of accountability. In both cases the locus of control is external (the public and various "special interests"). In some circumstances these external forces exercise limited and intermittent control over the council (e.g. through elections), thus setting the stage for a responsive form of accountability which depends a great deal on the values and commitments of the council members. Under other conditions there might be constant attention paid to all aspects of the council's performance, thus establishing an oversight system. Both approaches to accountability are acceptable under the council-manager form.

As the council's direct subordinate, the city manager is supposed to serve at the pleasure of the council while performing in a professional and efficient manner. In his or her relationship with the city council, the appointed city administrator is thus expected to operate under either a system of responsive accountability or one stressing oversight. In either case, if the administrator does not fulfill his or her duties in a manner the council judges to be acceptable, then the city manager is generally subject to immediate dismissal. Although there is a growing trend toward employment contracts for a set period of time, the general pattern is for city managers to have no job security. In fact, the number of city managers who have been fired or who resigned under pressure probably constitutes a substantial portion of the members of the profession. In some instances that pressure resulted from demands for greater responsiveness from the manager; at other times it emerges from the councils observations (through oversight) of the manager's performance.

Within the idealized council-manager system, the city manager would operate under one of two types of accountability vis-a-vis subordinates. As a professional administrator, the city manager is hired for his or her expertise in management of the day-to-day municipal affairs. In meeting those expectations, the city administrator may, in turn, operate under either a <u>command</u> or <u>responsible</u> system of accountability. Those who would use a <u>command</u> approach would like to see a manager act as the one who is "in charge" of the city's administration; those who advocate a <u>responsible</u> approach see the manager exercising his or her best judgement in hiring and managing the best staff possible and delegating appropriate authority to them. Either approach, if carried out with integrity, fits quite well into the council-manager model.

In summary, the council-manager form of government is able to support all four of the accountability systems in some form and fashion. What is important to note at this point is that there is not one system of accountability at work in manager-council governments, but several; furthermore, it is possible (and perhaps even likely) that those several systems will not always reflect the same values and attitudes. As a result, those involved in a council-manager arrangement constantly face the challenge of working within the context of multiple forms of accountability. Ideally they may seek to strike a balance among the disperate demands generated by the several accountability systems; all too often they are preoccupied with the consequences that result from the conflicts and abuses which too easily emerge under those conditions.

For purposes of illustration we rely on the recent experiences of three city managers in different midwestern cities. The first case illustrates the potential for complementary interaction among the different types of accountability. The second case illustrates the potential for conflict between the expectations of different systems of accountability and how that conflict can lead to dramatically different judgements of an individual's performance in specific instances. The third case shows how an accountability mechanism can be misused or even abused.

(1) The building inspector's scandal:

Our first case is that of Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) during a recent scandal over building inspectors misreporting the amount of time spent inspecting building sites. The city of KCMO has a long tradition of professional city management. The council members perceive themselves as <u>responsive</u> to their constituents through their basic representative functions, e.g., how they vote in council. The city council, in turn, expects the city manager to be responsive to their priorities, but he must also to act in a <u>responsible</u> fashion. Traditionally the council leaves internal administrative matters almost entirely up to the professional administrator.

Additional factors enter into this case, particularly the history of corrupt machine politics in KCMO and the general suspicion that characterizes the public's attitudes toward local government. These values generated a demand for greater oversight of the operations of KCMO's city government. Specifically, KCMO's past is marked by one of the best known political machines in America's urban history, the Pendergast Machine. Add to that history a general distrust of government and the popularity of investigatory reporting and you have a situation that promotes some degree of oversight accountability by the local media.

The city manager at the time of the incident, Robert Kipp, was well known for his "quiet" management style in which he delegated considerable responsibility to his assistants and city department heads while accepting the burden of being responsively accountable to the city council. The responsible assistant city managers and department heads, in the meanwhile, were expected to be in full command of the agencies.

Close scrutiny of events in KCMO at time of the building inspectors scandal, including the actions of the local media, the city council and the city manager, show the four types of accountability operating in concert to deal with a major scandal about city employees. The scandal was brought to light when the Kansas City Times/Star published the results of its investigation into abuses by city building inspectors. Evidence indicated that the building inspectors were overrepresenting the amount of time they spent inspecting building sites, and in some cases they reported inspections that were never made. In this instance the local media was activating the oversight system of accountability. As an external group it was monitoring the behavior of city employees and had minimal control over the actions of those employees.

The city manager in this instance immediately assumed the responsibility for the abuses, thereby accepting the responsible system of accountability. As city manager he took full responsibility for the misconduct of city employees even though he had delegated administrative responsibility to the relevant department head. He asked the city council to resist the temptation to step in and take responsibility for reorganizing the department's operations. In complying with the city manager's request, the city council in KCMO adhered to its system of responsive accountability. They were firm in articulating to the city manager their concern that the abuses be remedied at once; and they made it clear to the manager that his job security depended upon the prompt and capable resolution of the problem.

Mr. Kipp's administrative action involved instituting a command system of accountability in the building inspection department. He reorganized the inspection department so that the daily administration of the function was placed directly under one of his assistant city managers. The guilty inspectors were fired or suspended without pay and a more detailed timekeeping system was developed.

The actions of the media, the city manager, and the city council in KCMO regarding the building inspectors scandal displayed the complementary workings of the various accountability systems. When all the parts were working as the ideal would have it, the net result was the elimination of fraud against the public safety and interest. The media functioned in an oversight capacity. The city council held to its responsive system of accountability vis-a-vis the city manager.

The city manager assumed <u>responsibility</u> for the behavior of his subordinates and imposed a <u>command</u> system of accountability on that part of the organization that had failed to operate appropriately under the prior system of decentralization.

While this example illustrates the system can work effectively, even in the face of scandal, we do not suggest that the process is without cost. Such crises in accountability can take a toll on the actors. In the eyes of the citizens of KCMO, the credibility of city employees was severely damaged and the need for greater oversight was justified. The morale of innocent city employees outside the building inspection department was severely diminished by the adverse publicity and guilt by association. Furthermore, it is rumored that this scandal was one of the last straws that eventually led to Robert Kipp's decision to leave the city management profession.

(2) Firing the administrator of the year:

The remaining two cases focus on incidents which precipitated decisions by the respective governing bodies to seek the professional administrator's removal from office. In one case, the incompatibility of expectations for accountability were so stark that the administrator was fired on the very day he received an award for "Administrator of the Year" from the local chapter of the American Society of Public Administration. In the other instance the city manager used a traditional <u>oversight</u> accountability mechanism, an audit, for purposes unintended by the legislation, namely political retaliation and personal job survival

For an illustration of conflicting expectations arising from differing accountability systems we turn to Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) and the experience of W. James Medin, the city's first professional city manager. The city of Kansas City, Kansas has a long history of highly politicized administration under the control of the Democratic party's political machine. Prior to 1983, the city formally operated under a traditional commission form of government wherein individual commissioners had administrative responsibilities for various city functions, e.g., streets and maintenance, public safety, parks and recreation. Political patronage was a commonplace and accepted manner of distributing government contracts and jobs. Under this commission form of government the city commissioners were operating under a responsive type of accountability system. The security of their elected positions and the continuance of their administrative responsibilities depended upon the judgement of their voting constituents which, in turn, depended on their ability to "deliver" jobs and services. The locus of control was external (the voters,) and the degree of control over the administrative actions of the commissioners was minimal. Regularly scheduled elections were the only real opportunities for voters to exercise the control they had over commissioners.

With the passage of the local government reform measure in 1982, Kansas City, Kansas adopted a council-manager form of government. Under the charter reform elected officials were to have broad policy-making responsibilities but no administrative duties; the administrative responsibilities for municipal government were allocated to an appointed professional city administrator. The elected council members were still expected to be operating under a responsive type of accountability system; their continuance in office as a city council member was dependent upon the judgement of the voting public. However, the delivery of city services was to be done on a more professional, "nonpatronage" basis.

Issues of accountability arose in KCK when the city manager sought to make a major personnel decision, hiring a new chief for the fire department. Under the new KCK city charter the city administrator is responsible for all city personnel decisions, except for the city clerk who is also appointed by the city council. To the extent that the city council gets involved in personnel matters it is at the broadest policy level, such as determining (as they did) that all city employees must live within the city limits.

In early 1985 the city administrator initiated a search for a new fire chief, a responsibility that was clearly his exclusive prerogative under the city charter. Applications for fire chief were received from ten individuals within the KCK fire department and from nine individuals outside the city. All candidates were required to take a battery of tests on the various supervisory and practical aspects of firefighting.

The results of these tests created a conflict between the city manager's sense of responsibility as a professional administrator and the judgement of his city council in terms of his responsiveness to the council's priorities. From the city manager's position, his professional responsibility to the city and the fire department necessitated he make a decision to hire the candidate who seemed best qualified for the fire chief's position. The city manager decided that his choice for fire chief would be from among the top test scorers. The council, on the other hand, preferred promoting from within the department. The conflict arose with the city council because the candidates who received the top eight scores on the tests were from outside the city.[44]

From the city council's perspective, the city manager needed to be <u>responsive</u> to their concerns. The city council members had to reckon with strong sentiment within the fire department that the top job was "a reward for years of service to the city."[45] This attitude fit well into the traditional patronage values that had characterized KCK's commission form of government for decades. Furthermore, the Mayor disputed the value of the tests used to rank the candidates. When the city manager officially informed the council that he planned to hire an outside applicant for the department's top job, the Mayor quickly sought his resignation. Although the mayor compared the firing of the city manager to baseball managers who come and go, not all city council members shared the views of the mayor and the firefighters. Councilman George Dunn said Medin "has done an admirable job of attempting to eliminate political patronage. Mr. Medin is not supposed to hire anyone just because a councilman or the mayor asks or tells him to do so." [46]

These differences in perspectives on the type of accountability system relevant to the hiring of a fire chief were the basis for the disagreement between the city manager and the city council. The city council voted (4-3) to fire Mr. Medin when he refused their request to resign. On the evening of the very day the KCK council voted to fire Mr. Medin, the Kansas City Metropolitan Chapter of the American Society of Public Administration formally presented their award to Mr. Medin for "Administrator of the Year" at a dinner that had been scheduled weeks in advance.

The anomaly of being fired and honored on the same day could occur because different groups were using different systems of accountability to reach their conclusions. The fact that a majority of KCK council members thought his performance was poor enough to warrant dismissal while his professional peers thought his performance was so outstanding that it merited an award points up the potential incompatability of expectations between the systems of accountability each group used as reference points. The local ASPA chapter used the standards of professional management, or a system of responsible accountability as their standard for judging performance. The KCK city council used the standard of responsive accountability in their judgement of the city manager's performance. Each group used a legitimate system of accountability; the fact that they could come to such dramatically different conclusions about the performance of Medin indicates the potential incompatibility between these two types of accountability.

(3) The travel audit:

Our third example reveals a different facet of accountability, namely, how an accountability system which is supposed to foster appropriate behavior can be misused for personal political purposes. The case focuses on the experiences of the city council and city manager in the city of Columbia, Missouri in the spring of 1985. The city manager at that time was Richard Gray, who served in that position from October 1980 until April 1985.

This case illustrates an instance where the city manager chose to use an oversight accountability mechanism, an audit, for questionable purposes. In early spring of 1985 the city council held a performance review of the city manager. At that time it became clear to Mr. Gray that the mayor was dissatisfied with his performance and was going to seek the manager's removal from office. By way of gathering ammunition to use in his struggle to keep his job, the city manager ordered an audit of the mayor's travel expenses from 1981 to the present. The city manager's tactic was calculated to trigger the responsive accountability arrangement that existed between the mayor and local citizens. Mr. Gray hoped to protect his job as manager by bringing about the mayor's removal from office through recall or, at the least, neutralizing him politically. When asked about his motivation behind ordering the audit, the city manager "acknowledged . the mayor wanted to fire him and his request for the audit were related. 'It was my survival instinct,' Mr. Gray said. 'The situation had become, one of us will have to go. I was looking to find a reason the mayor might go.'"[47]

The mayor of Columbia resigned two weeks after the audit was ordered and ten days before he was cleared in the probe. The auditor concluded that although the mayor may not have exercised the best judgement in charging some expenses to the city, he had done nothing that warranted further action. The city manager asked to take a 30 day leave of absence to let the publicity calm down.

The council ultimately held the manager to a responsible system of accountability. Once the council determined that they no longer had confidence in the manager as chief administrative officer of the city, they asked him to resign, which he did on May 7, 1985. The council chastized the manager's actions as prompted by anger and meanness. They urged the manager to "think about controlling [his] temper, and think about proper ways to deal with the council."[48]

Among other things, the Columbia, Missouri case demonstrates the potential for using one accountability mechanism to trigger another accountability system. In this instance the city manager used his access to an <u>oversight</u> accountability mechanism (an audit) to trigger a <u>responsiveness</u> accountability mechanism between the voters and the mayor. In this Mr. Gray was successful, for the mayor resigned when faced with the need to account for his actions to his constituents. However, Mr. Gray's actions also triggered a concern for the accountability of the city manager. After assessing what had taken place, the city council decided that the city manager's actions were <u>irresponsible</u>.

Mr. Gray's actions suggest a number of issues regarding what is responsible behavior. The travel expenses subjected to audit dated back to 1981. It could be argued that if the city manager had reason to believe the mayor was charging inappropriate travel expenses against city accounts, he had a <u>responsibility</u> as a professional manager to initiate an audit long before 1985. If he did not have sufficient reason to believe the expenses were inappropriate, then he was irresponsible in ordering the audit for personal reasons when his job was threatened. It is clear that various accountability systems were at work in this case, and that they worked well in the long-run. However, it is also quite obvious that in this case it was the misuse and even abuse of those accountability systems that were central to the entire episode.

F. Summary

The four accountability systems posited in this paper were all derivatives of the the dualism that characterizes American attitudes and behavior toward public administration. They all share a common root, and none is any less justifiable or viable under historical and current political norms. Indeed, under ideal conditions all four types of accountability can enhance the likelihood that the political repesentation and managerial performance standards will be satisfied. Our Kansas City, Missouri example illustrates the appropriate working of the four types even under conditions of organizational stress.

Yet, as with human siblings, these accountability systems are not necessarily able to coexist without conflict within the same jurisdiction or organization. Problems sometimes arise for the accountable parties and their constituents when multiple accountability systems operate at cross purposes within a jurisdiction, as illustrated in the cases of Kansas City, Kansas and Columbia, Missouri.. There are obviously some inherent conflicts to be found among the accountability systems; just as Edmund Burke told the people of Bristol that they must choose between a delegate and a trustee, so a jurisdiction occasionally may have to choose between having a responsive and responsible bureaucracy.

Our intention in this paper was to suggest the need for more conceptual development, clarity of thinking, and precision of language when discussing accountability in public administration. Using these cases as heuristic devices, we suggest a typology of accountability mechanisms as a first step toward an operational theory of public administration accountability, one that recognizes the Janus-like nature of public administration. We also indicate how the interaction of accountability mechanisms can result in inappropriate behavior. Our last case, that of Columbia Missouri, suggests the need to be careful in the use of accountability mechanisms that are in place to minimize the chances that they can be misused or abused for personal gain.

From this point much research needs to be done. Only systematic examination of accountability systems in action will yield insight into the conditions which give rise to public administration accountability. Further research will also be necessary to answer some of the intriguing questions about when and how types of accountability systems complement or conflict with each other. As we move from a search for some ideal form of accountability and toward a concern for the dynamics of existing accountability systems we will certainly come to a greater appreciation of the complexities and dilemmas that make American public administration such a fascinating and challenging topic.

Endnotes

[1]See J. Peter Grace, WAR ON WASTE: PRESIDENT'S PRIVATE SECTOR SURVEY ON COST CONTROL (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1984). The issue of reorganizing and reforming the federal bureaucracy has been a characteristic of the 20th century, and efforts to reform subnational governments go back to the middle 19th century. See Harold Seidman, POLITICS, POSITION, AND POWER: THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATION, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); also Martin J. Schiesl, THE POLITICS OF EFFICIENCY: MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION AND REFORM IN AMERICA, 1880-1920 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977).

[2]The Friedrich-Finer debate represents the classic confrontation between those who favor external controls to assure accountability [Herman Finer, "Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government," PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 1 (Summer, 1941): 335-350], and those who would rely less on the use of threats, coercion, and bothersome oversight and more on methods which internalize accountability in the practitioner themselves [Carl Joachim Friedrich, "Public Policy and the Nature of Administrative Responsibility," in PUBLIC POLICY 1940, edited by C. J. Friedrich and Edward S. Mason (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 19400: 3-24]. We will return to the assumptions underlying this debate later in this paper.

[3]Herbert A. Simon, Donald W. Smithburg, and Victor A. Thompson, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 513.

[4]E. Leslie Normanton, "Public Accountability and Audit: A Reconnaissance," in THE DILEMMA OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN MODERN GOVERNMENT: INDEPENDENCE VERSUS CONTROL, edited by Bruce L. R. Smith and D. C. Hague (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), p. 311.

[5]This definition is offered in the glossary of Thomas Vocino and Jack Rabin, et al., CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981), p. 453.

[6]Ira Sharkansky, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AGENCIES, POLICIES, AND POLITICS (San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1982), p. 12.

[7]Jerome B. McKinney and Lawrence C. Howard, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: BALANCING POWER AND ACCOUNTABILITY (Oak Park, IL: Moore Publishing Co., 1979), p. 30.

[8]Spiro's distinction is actually three-fold, for he also includes "obligation" as the third dimension. He regards obligation as a combination of both accountability and causal attribution. See

Herbert J. Spiro, RESPONSIBILITY IN GOVERNMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1969), chapter II, esp. pp. 14-15.

[9]Amitai Etzioni, "Alternative Conceptions of Accountability: The Example of Health Administration," PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 25, no. 3 (May/June, 1975): 279-281.

[10]Ibid., pp. 281-282.

[11]Ibid., pp. 282-283.

[12]Ibid., pp. 283-285.

[13]David Z. Robinson, "Government Contracting for Academic Research: Accountability in the American Experience," in Smith and Hague (eds.), THE DILEMMA OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN MODERN GOVERNMENT, pp. 108-113.

[14]See Bruce L. R. Smith, "Accountability and Independence in the Contract State," in Smith and Hague (eds.), THE DILEMMA OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN MODERN GOVERNMENT. pp. 5-8.

[15]John A. Rohr, "The Study of Ethics In the P.A. Curriculum," PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 36, no. 4 (July/August, 1976), p. 399.

[16]Louis Hartz, THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN AMERICA: AN INTERPRETATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE THE REVOLUTION (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955).

[17]Daniel J. Boorstin, THE GENIUS OF AMERICAN POLITICS (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1953).

[18]Walter Lippmann, ESSAYS IN THE PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY (New York: New American Library, 1955).

[19]William H. Riker, DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES, 2nd edition (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965).

[20]Seymour Martin Lipset, THE FIRST NEW NATION: THE UNITED STATES IN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1973).

[21]Samuel P. Huntington, AMERICAN POLITICS: THE PROMISE OF DISHARMONY (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1981), p. 14. For a view of the alternatives to the liberal American Creed, see Theodore J. Lowi, "Ronald Reagan -- Revolutionary?" in THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE GOVERNING OF AMERICA, edited by Lester M. Salamon and Michael S. Lund (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1985), pp. 32-36.

[22]For a contrasting view, see Lowi, "Ronald Reagan -- Revolutionary?" in Salamon and Lund (eds.), THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE GOVERNING OF AMERICA, pp. 36ff.

[23]Abraham Kaplan, AMERICAN ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 37.

[24]See Schiesl, THE POLITICS OF EFFICIENCY.

[25]Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, 2, no. 1 (1887).

[26]On various conceptions of effectiveness, see Robert C. Fried, PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN BUREAUCRACY (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), pp. 55-78.

[27]"Economy" in government administration is the central theme in the Grace Commission report. Those who focus on economy seek to minimize waste and duplication of services as opposed to seeking goal achievement (effectiveness) or maximizing the optimal use of available resources (efficiency).

[28]Compare, for example, Ida R. Hoos, SYSTEMS ANALYSIS IN PUBLIC POLICY: A CRITIQUE, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), with Robert E. Goodin and Peter Wilenski, "Beyond Efficiency: The Logical Underpinnings of Administrative Principles," PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 44, no. 6 (November/December, 1984): 512-517.

[29]On the general nature of managerial control, see Peter F. Drucker, MANAGEMENT: TASKS, RESPONSIBILITIES, PRACTICES (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974), chapter 39.

[30]For some analysts, the question of control is the principal one in the design of public organizations. See Victor A. Thompson, WITHOUT SYMPATHY OR ENTHUSIASM: THE PROBLEM OF ADMINISTRATIVE COMPASSION (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp.

16-17.

[31]See the arguments of those in the "New Public Administration" movement, particularly Michael M. Harmon, "Normative Theory and Public Administration: Some Suggestions for a Redefinition of Administrative Responsibility," in TOWARD A NEW PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE MINNOWBROOK PERSPECTIVE, edited by Frank Marini (Scanton, PA: Chandler Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 172-185.

[32]Compare, for example, Peter Woll, AMERICAN BUREAUCRACY (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977), with Theodore J. Lowi, THE END OF LIBERALISM: THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979).

[33]On the problems of exercising managerial accountability, see Herbert Kaufman, ADMINISTRATIVE FEEDBACK: MONITORING SUBORDINATES' BEHAVIOR (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1973); also Michael Lipsky, STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY: DILEMMAS OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN PUBLIC SERVICES (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980), chapter 11.

[34]See Richard P. Nathan, THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRESIDENCY (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1983), esp. pp. 3-11.

[35]For a practitioner's perspective on how this authoritarianism develops and its consequences, see Donald E. Walker, "When The Tough Get Going, The Going Gets Tough: The Myth Of The Muscle Administration," PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 36, no. 4 (July/August, 1976): 439-445.

[36]See Lawrence C. Dodd and Richard L. Schott, CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1979), esp. chapter 6; also Joel D. Aberbach, "Changes in Congressional Oversight," in MAKING BUREAUCRACIES WORK, edited by Carol H. Weiss and Alan H. Barton (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 65-87.

[37]It is difficult to characterize the Reagan administration since it is still in office, but the scenario that has been followed began with the "Reaganization" of the bureaucracy and the development of White House strategies to oversee the implementation of the Reagan agenda through the actions of political appointees. Thus, Reagan has not actually "taken command," but instead has established powerful oversight mechanisms that constantly checks on the work of subordinates who are actually doing the job. This approach explains in part Reagan's willingness to put up with the James Watts of his administration and his ability to weather the storms created by their actions. Relying on oversight rather than command, Reagan gets what

he wants without having to participate, thus avoiding any explicit responsibility. See Chester A. Newland, "Executive Office Policy Apparatus: Enforcing the Reagan Agenda," in Salamon and Lund (eds.), THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE GOVERNING OF AMERICA, pp. 135-168; compare with Nathan, THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRESIDENCY, pp. 11-12. It is also interesting to consider the "hidden-hand" leadership approach of Eisenhower in light of this thesis; see Fred I. Greenstein, THE HIDDEN-HAND PRESIDENCY: EISENHOWER AS LEADER (New York: Basic Books, 1982), esp. discussion of his "informal organization" in chapter 4.

[38]The role of the courts in overseeing the integration of schools is well documented. The courts have played similar roles in other areas, e.g. voting rights and the requirement for environmental impact statements. See Howard Ball, Dale Krane, and Thomas P. Lauth, COMPROMISED COMPLIANCE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), chapter 4; also Serge Taylor, MAKING BUREAUCRACIES THINK: THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT STRATEGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), esp. chapter 11.

[39]For a description and critical assessment of the role of public interest groups, see Jeffrey M. Berry, LOBBYING FOR THE PEOPLE; THE POLITICAL BEHAVIOR OF PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[40]On the nature of "responsibility," see references to work of Spiro and Harmon cited above. Also see Terry L. Cooper, THE RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATOR: AN APPROACH TO ETHICS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1982).

[41]The classical statement of the pluralist position is found in David B. Truman, THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS: POLITICAL INTERESTS AND PUBLIC OPINION, 2nd edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), esp. chapter 14. Also see Emmette S. Redford, DEMOCRACY IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[42]See Lowi, THE END OF LIBERALISM; also Peter Navarro, THE POLICY GAME: HOW SPECIAL INTERESTS AND IDEOLOGUES ARE STEALING AMERICA (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984).

[43]See James H. Svara, "Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities," in PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, 45, no. 1 (January/February 1985): 221-232.

[44]Steve Farnsworth, "KCK council dismisses Medin," KANSAS CITY TIMES, May 24, 1985, p. A-1.

[45] Steve Farnsworth, "Fire chief selection at center of dispute, Medin says," KANSAS CITY TIMES, May 21, 1985, p. B-2.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. B-6.

[47] "Columbia Mayor May Resign Over Audit," in KANSAS CITY TIMES, April 12, 1985, p. B-2.

[48] Kenneth Reid, "Columbia mayor quits; council warns manager," KANSAS CITY TIMES, April 13, 1985.

Errata: To be corrected in "Accountability in Public Administration"

The following should be substituted on p. 3:

B. Defining Accountability

The search for a definition of accountability is not as frustrating as the search for meanings of other frequently used terms. The definitions available to us, however, cover a wide range of perspectives on the topic. In the classic Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson textbook it was defined in a way that stressed the existence of preconditions for accountability: "those methods, procedures, and forces that determine what values will be reflected in administrative decisions."[3] In a more recent work, E. Leslie Normanton highlights the view of accountability as an ongoing responsibility imposed on the accountable agency or individual: "a liability to reveal, to explain and to justify what one does; how one discharges responsibilities. . . ."[4] Another source defines in a way that also places much of concept in the hands of the accountable party, but in a different — and much more political — way: the "extent to which an organization believes that it is answerable for its actions to the people it serves."[5] Ira Sharkansky is much more explicit in noting the linkage between accountability and politics when he argues that the issue of accountability "gets at the question of control, or Who rules."[6] Finally, there are those who define the term to include the "means" associated with accountability: "any situation in which individuals who exercise power are expected to be constrained and in fact are reasonably constrained by external means . . . and to a degree by internal norms. . . ."[7]

The following should be substituted on p. 27:

that the mayor was dissatisfied with his performance and was going to seek the manager's removal from office. By way of gathering ammunition to use in his struggle to keep his job, the city manager ordered an audit of the mayor's travel expenses from 1981 to the present. The city manager's tactic was calculated to trigger the responsive accountability arrangement that existed between the mayor and local citizens. Mr. Gray hoped to protect his job as manager by bringing about the mayor's removal from office through recall or, at the least, neutralizing him politically. When asked about his motivation behind ordering the audit, the city manager "acknowledged... that he would be 'less than honest' if he said that reports that the mayor wanted to fire him and his request for the audit were not related. 'It was my survival instinct,' Mr. Gray said. 'The situation had become, one of us will have to go. I was looking to find a reason the mayor might go.'"[47]