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ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE CENTRALITY OF EXPECTATIONS IN AMERICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers the foundations for a middle-range theory of public administration based on the centrality of expectations and the recognition of individual, organizational, and institutional means for coping with them. The paper explores the relevance and roots of expectations as the central concept in developing such a theory and presents a brief overview of the sources of expectations. A more detailed discussion follows of several key characteristics of expectations and their relation to ongoing issues in the study of American public administration. The primary question for constructing a middle-range theory based on expectations is how they are "handled" on individual, organizational, and institutional levels. This framework sets the stage for the development of testable propositions which address that question and facilitate the theory-building process.

INTRODUCTION

For students of public administration, the issue of accountability cuts two ways. On the one hand, public administration poses a significant challenge to democratic systems by evading or wearing away at the many accountability mechanisms and methods which were designed to tame it.

> Traditional controls over American bureaucracy eroded drastically over the past six decades of the twentieth century. Recent efforts to find new devices or to resuscitate old ones have brought forward means that provided occasional brakes on the bureaucracy and transmit public attitudes, but by and large they have failed to develop strong, regular, and effective controls over the administrative agencies of the U.S. governmental system (Krislov and Rosenbloom 1981, p. 155).[1]

On the other hand, accountability systems have posed a challenge to the effectiveness of public agencies and programs, especially in the United States where the lines of institutional responsibility are vaguely drawn and subject to shifting (see Krislov and Rosenbloom 1981, pp. 123-127). Under such conditions,

> To say that an agency must often operate without clear guidance is an understatement. Rather, it becomes the object of an institutional struggle, waged more or less intensively depending on the issues and stakes associated with its functions at any given time. Sometimes it must operate under conditions of intense institutional conflict (Derthick 1990, p. 177).

Our own concern with the latter side of the accountability issue led us to conclude that the results of misapplied accountability mechanisms can prove tragic as well as administratively costly (see Romzek and Dubnick 1987). By seeing accountability systems as a means through which public administrators seek to manage expectations (as well as a means through which others seek to control public administrators), we were able to open more insightful doors on the continuing mystery of what makes American bureaucracies tick.[2]

The fact that the concept of "expectations" rose to the surface during our exploration of accountability systems is not surprising in hindsight. In one or another form (e.g., interests, demands, pressures), expectations have played a major role in the analysis of

bureaucratic behavior for more than fifty years. Nevertheless, our review of the literature indicated that the theoretical potential of the concept has not been realized. This paper is intended, in part, to remedy that situation by articulating the conceptual foundation of a middle-range theory based on the concept of expectations. In the process, we are also conceptually reinforcing our own research agenda that seeks to understand how public administrators cope with the challenges posed by the multiple, diverse, and oftentimes contradictory expectations that are inherent to their jobs.

AN EXPECTATIONS-BASED THEORY

The Need for Theory

Within the academic endeavor of public administration there exists a growing sense of the need for some theoretical underpinnings. There are several reasons for this development. In part, it is a matter of status within the academic community. As members of the social sciences, many public administrationists are plagued with "physics envy"—a freudianesque affliction compelling them to develop a Newtonian-like theory for human social behavior (Hirschman 1991, p. 155). As progeny of political science, many see a distinctive theory of public administration as a means for reinforcing efforts to establish separate institutional identities (Landau 1972, chapter 7). Others seek a theory to prevent the loss of that identity within the often prosperous confines of generic management and business schools. Theory is also crucial for those who realize that the field's status within academe is linked to its ability to contribute to the work of others: "...if public administration is to maintain its claim to independence from other disciplines or fields," writes Perry, "it must not only import theory and knowledge from them, but it must also export theory and knowledge" (Perry 1991, p. 2).

Beyond the collective self-interest of public administration academics, there are other concerns driving the search for a theory of public administration. The credibility of the public administration "profession"—that is, the professional status of practitioners who identify with each other under the flag of MPA degrees and organizations such as the American Society for Public Administration—depends in part on the credibility of the knowledge base

provided by public administration researchers and teachers. This knowledge base, in turn, is often linked to the development of an appropriate theory that would provide a focal point for research (Perry 1991, pp. 2, 5-6). Similarly, a theory that established shared meanings would facilitate problem-solving efforts among practitioners, especially in a field as functionally and intellectually diverse as public administration (see Landau 1972, pp. 178-180). Finally, theories can offer practitioners and others the intellectual infrastructure for conducting evaluative, proscriptive, or prescriptive assessments of public administration activities (Fried 1976).

Until recently, the search for a theory of public administration has been paradigmatic and epistemological rather than empirical—that is, it has taken the form of debates over **how** we know, and **why** we know it instead of concentrating on what we know (see Denhardt 1990). On the one hand, it has been a search for the foundations of grand theories that attempt to integrate the diverse dimensions of the field through a comprehensive framework such as "democratic administration" or "political economy" (Perry 1991, pp. 3-5). On the other hand, the search has sometimes taken a reductionist approach that attempts to uncover the *primum mobile*—or primary cause[3]— of administrative behavior through the application of various rational choice models to the behaviors of public administrators and agencies. Both approaches have stimulated much discussion and contributed many insights, but neither has generated a theory that is widely accepted and applied.

The lack of widespread enthusiasm for these theories of public administration is evidenced by the general indifference of practitioners to most of these frameworks or their derivatives. Devastating critiques and professional education curricula notwithstanding, practitioners still rely on the classical formulations of the field, perhaps most effectively summarized by the POSDCORB acronym. It is tempting to dismiss this practitioner reliance on discredited theory by claiming that they lack the capacity to deal with the more sophisticated and complex models being offered by public administration scholars. Such a rationalization, however, is another version of blaming the victim, for academe has yet to put forth a theory that makes as much sense of the world of public administration as did the classical formulations. For practitioners, a public administration theory should be developed based on what

we know—it must have an empirical foundation that complements an epistemological and/or paradigmatic one.

This critical assessment is nothing new. In fact, it reflects a theme repeated for the last half century by those who played a role in intellectually undermining the classical public administration paradigm.[4] Another indicator of the detachment of public administration theory from a familiar empirical base is found in the praise bestowed on Wilson (1989) for his award-winning book, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It.* The praise was well deserved, for Wilson is among our most insightful and lucid scholars. But many academics who have studied public administration for decades saw little that was new in Wilson's acclaimed work.[5] What Wilson had accomplished, however, is most clearly stated in the book's subtitle: he articulated a theory (**why** they do it) that related directly to observations of **what** government agencies do.

A "Middle-Range Theory" Approach

There is a growing realization that public administration theory must be linked to a more empirically-relevant position. Ventriss calls for a "mutual learning research approach to help bridge the dichotomy between theory and research" (1991, p. 12); while Hummel (1991) argues for accepting "stories managers tell" as a valid knowledge base for the public administration field. More explicitly, Perry (1991, pp. 6-13) argues for less comprehensive approaches to public administration theory that have their roots in Robert Merton's call for a "middle-range" theory-building strategy.

Merton proffered the "middle-range theory" in the 1950s as a response to those who sought a theoretical approach "intermediate to the minor working hypotheses evolved in abundance during day-to-day routines of research, and the all-inclusive speculations comprising a master conceptual scheme" (Merton 1957, pp. 5-6). Although not consciously adopted as a theory-building strategy in public administration, middle-range theory approaches have been used regularly by observers of bureaucratic behavior such as Herbert Kaufman, Aaron Wildavsky, James Q. Wilson and others.[6] Only recently have the attributes of this approach been made explicit (Lane 1990). These attributes include: (1) "a focus on actual decision makers"; (2) "an expanded self-interest axiom" that goes beyond the

narrow assumptions of **homo economicus**; (3) "close attention to the environment"; (4) "a strong logical quality" stressing the "explanatory quality" of the theory; and (5) "an overriding concern with specificity" that avoids making grandiose claims for the theoretical generalizations being applied to individual cases (Lane 1990, p. 928).[7] The immediate past and foreseeable future of public administration theory seems linked to the further development of such middle-range theories.

Perry (1991, p. 10-11) lists four guidelines for assessing appropriate middle-range theories for public administration. These include: (1) relevance to the defining "features of the field" (e.g., "the focus on executive activity, accomplishment of activity, and embeddedness in a political system"); (2) a grounding in the historical concerns of public administration; (3) a broad relevance to the diverse subjects covered by the field; and (4) a potential for meaningful linkage to the "concept of 'public'" which underlies the identity of the field.

In the balance of this paper, we elaborate the core ingredients for an evolving middle-range theory framework we believe meets those criteria. In previously published applications, we used the framework to help us make institutional sense of the circumstances surrounding the Challenger accident (Romzek and Dubnick 1987) as well as the theme for an introductory curriculum in public administration (Dubnick and Romzek 1991). Our intent is to set the stage for a body of work in the middle range that can enhance our understanding and appreciation for the work of public administration.

The "Expectations Framework"

One of the problems with tagging any theory with a "name" is that the choice tends to highlight a particular feature of the framework while downplaying other important characteristics. Our first use of this framework to study the Challenger accident highlighted a typology of accountability systems, but our textbook placed greater emphasis on the "management of expectations" as a core feature of the theory. In the rest of this paper we will use the label "expectations framework" to designate our general approach, for expectations play a fundamental role. Nevertheless, there are other features of the approach that should be noted, and to accomplish this we rely on the five attributes of relevant middle-range theories described by Lane

in her analysis of "concrete theories" emerging in political science (1990, p. 928).

As noted above, Lane argues that a concrete (i.e., middle-range) theory focuses attention on "actual decision makers, usually political elites, as the object of study...." In so doing, concrete theories avoid emphasizing mass behavior, institutions, and fictional individuals driven by rational choice logic (Lane 1990, p. 928).[8] The expectations framework highlights the behavior of public administrators or their surrogates[9] at all levels of the field. In this sense, we do not concentrate on "elites" in public administration, but instead emulate the more inclusive approach used by James Q. Wilson who focused on the action of operators ("rank-and-file employees"), managers (those who "are supposed to coordinate the work of operators in order to attain organizational goals"), and executives (whose primary function is to maintain their agencies' effectiveness and autonomy in the task environment) (Wilson 1989, pp. 27-28, 154, 181). The central point is that the expectations framework is based on the behavior of "actual decision makers."

Second, Lane's concrete theory uses "an expanded self-interest axiom that deepens the level of explanation by providing for a variety of political, as distinct from purely economic, goals. . ." (Lane 1990, p. 928). In the expectations framework, we apply this broader concept of self-interest by relying on a simple "means-ends" model of rational behavior that holds that "human behavior is mostly **goal-directed,** often in a fairly consistent manner, in many important classes of social situations" (Harsanyi 1986, pp. 83-85). From our perspective, public administrators are assumed to act rationally most of the time with the intent of dealing with the expectations that pervade their tasks. That is, we begin with the premise that **much of their self-interested behavior is driven by the need to effectively cope with expectations.**[10] As we see below, coping can take a variety of forms at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels of public administration action. This self-interest approach quite explicitly avoids the more reductionist models that have individual actors following either a strictly economic or rule-based logic (see Ostrom 1991).

A third attribute of middle-range/concrete theory offered by Lane holds that the framework pays "close attention to the environment, especially the political institutions and the political environment within which decisions occur..." (Lane 1990, p. 928). As noted below,

our framework posits a multidimensional environment as the key source of the expectations which are so central to our theory (see Dubnick and Romzek 1991, chapter 4 and Part II). In that sense, we go well beyond the political environment and factor in physical, technological, demographic, cultural, and other features of the environment.

Fourth, Lane posits that middle-range/concrete theory should be characterized by "a strong logical quality, which vigorously shapes its materials into dynamic models that capture the 'action' of politics—giving concrete theory its radically explanatory quality..." (Lane 1990, p. 928). At this time, our expectations framework can only aspire to this attribute, for its logic awaits shaping through its application to a variety of cases. Our model in this regard is found in Blau's (1963) study on *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy*. A student of Merton prior to his articulation of the "middle-range theory" strategy, Blau offers an epilogue giving us some insight into the methodological evolution of his classic study. He speaks of having spent time writing down his initial ideas and hypotheses.

Some of the hypotheses advanced at this early stage were later abandoned; others were supported by empirical observations, but even these were often modified and refined in the course of research. This process of selection and modification indicates that no claim can be made that hypotheses have been subjected to a rigorous test in this case study. But the idea that research methods can neatly be classified into hypothesis-testing and insight-supplying ones is grossly misleading, since these are polar types that appear in actual ones in various admixtures. The double aim is always to develop investigations in various admixtures. The double aim is always to develop or refine theoretical insights which explain reality . . . and to discriminate between the correct and the false explanatory principles.... My endeavor to stipulate hypotheses, some in advance of the empirical research and some in the course of it, . . . served the purpose of furnishing a screening device for insights. The ideas that survived this screening test, while still only hypotheses . . . , were more likely to be correct than were the original speculations. (Blau 1963, pp. 271-272)[11]

Similarly, the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973)[12] also provides a standard to which our framework aspires, for the explanatory value of their study of implementation emerged in the process of applying their "policy implementation" framework. Only in later implementation studies does the "strong logical quality" of the framework become more evident (e.g., Bardach 1977).

Finally, Lane notes that middle-range/concrete theories have "an overriding concern with specificity"—that is, "not with institutions in general, but with specific institutions, not behavior in general but specific types of behavior. . ." (Lane 1990, p. 928). This characteristic is obviously linked to the fact that concrete theories rely on studies of "actual decision makers" rather than mass behavior or other subjects for which aggregate data can be collected. Even more important for the expectations framework, however, is the situational nature of the subject matter, for in public administration non-generalizable circumstances are the rule rather than the exception. "Situational imperatives" play a critical role in the work of many public administrators (Wilson 1989, pp. 36-44), and this is especially true where complex combinations of expectations are part of the circumstances surrounding government operations. This does not mean, however, that we are condemned to doing no more than cataloging historical episodes of public administration behavior under an infinite variety of situations. There are generalizations—albeit limited in scope—to be drawn from applications of the expectations framework through individual and comparative case studies.[13] The very rationale for investing in middle-range theory research is to gain further insight into the actions being studied—insights which can then be applied in still other circumstances. Our own analysis of the management of expectations by city management professionals provided us with insights that helped us better understand the role of accountability systems in the case of the Challenger accident, and further applications resulted in greater clarification of the nature of expectations.

The Central Premise: Dealing With Expectations

As an exercise in middle-range theory building, our elaboration of the expectations framework needs to return to fundamental premises. The most basic of these premises is derived from numerous readings about—and observations of—the situation facing public administrators. As already implied, there is no such thing as a "typical" situation facing all public administrators. There is a common thread, however, that emerges in different forms from the literature. Whether describing public administrators at work or the activities of public agencies, the constant seems to be the need to cope

with situations in which there are multiple, diverse, and often conflicting pressures.[14]

A typical case in point is found in McPhee's (1989) essay on the work of those charged with controlling the flow of the Mississippi River. Heading that effort during the late 1980s was Major General Thomas Sands who served in the dual role of commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lower Mississippi Valley Division and president of the Mississippi River Commission. Each fall, General Sands boarded a river "towboat" in St. Louis and headed down the Mississippi River toward the Gulf of Mexico on an inspection trip that included stops along the way to hold hearings and hear complaints about what the Corps is or should be doing. At issue was how the Corps handles its management of various flood control structures along the river. "In years gone by," noted McPhee, "when there were no control structures, there were no complaints. The water went where it pleased. People took it as it came. The delta was in a state of nature." But now the Mississippi was "valved and metered" by the Corps, and "there are two million nine hundred thousand potential complainers, very few of whom are reluctant to present a grievance to the Corps."

> ... General Sands cheerfully remarks that every time he makes one of these trips he gets "beaten on the head and shoulders. . . . The crawfisherman and the shrimper come up within five minutes asking for opposite things. The crawfishermen say, 'Put more water in, the water is low.' Shrimpers don't want more water. They are benefitted by low water. Navigation interests say, 'The water is too low, don't take more away or you'll have to dredge.' Municipal interests say, 'Keep the water high or you'll increase saltwater intrusion.' In the high-water season, everybody is interested in less water. As the water starts dropping, upstream farmers say, 'Get the water off us quicker.' But folks downstream don't want it quicker. As water levels go up, we divert some fresh water into marshes, because the marshes need it for the nutrients and the sedimentation, but oyster fishermen complain. They all complain except the ones who have seed-oyster beds, which are destroyed by excessive salinity. The variety of competing interests in phenomenal" (McPhee 1989, pp. 22-23).

Despite the uniqueness of the particular pressures being felt by General Sands and other members of the Corps' Lower Mississippi Valley Division, they share with other public administrators the fact that they are subject to a wide "variety of competing interests," each seeking a certain behavior by the Corps.

Those familiar with the bureaucratic politics literature in political science will note that there is nothing new about this observation. In the 1930s, Herring (1936) structured his analysis of public administration around the idea that agencies must contend with competing interests, and fifty years later Rourke noted that the role of the bureaucracy in the domestic policy arena "commonly represents reconciliation of conflicting groups interests as much as it does the application of expertise toward solving particular problems" (Rourke 1984, pp. 83-84). But the pressures of special interests are not quite the whole story. Other factors—such as "law, experience, and professional norms" (Wilson 1989, p. 73), to name but a few—also enter into the picture.

The common thread is not the pressures of various interests alone, but the expectations that those pressures and other factors create. We contend that a central fact in the world of public administrators is the *need to deal with expectations*, no matter what their source.

THE CONCEPT OF EXPECTATIONS

Conceptual Roots

Students of government administration have not made far-reaching use of the concept of expectations despite its central place in the study of governmental and social action during the post-World War Two era. The concept does play a major role in at least one classic work in the study of public administration during that period. In *Administrative Behavior*, Simon posits "knowledge, memory, and expectation" as the three factors in conscious human behavior that differentiated the social from the natural sciences (Simon 1957, p. 251). Simon regarded expectations as a central characteristic of "purposive" group behavior, where "A's decision may depend on his expectation of B's behavior, while B's decision may depend on his expectation of A's behavior. . . ."

> It is a fundamental characteristic of social institutions that their stability and even their existence depend on expectations of this sort. . . .
>
> Applying these considerations to the field of administration, we see first of all that the administrative organization implies purposive behavior on the part of its participants. Hence, the expectations of these participants will be a factor

in determining their behavior. Further, part of their expectations will involve expectations as to the behavior of other members of the administrative organization.

> In this sense administration is not unlike play-acting. The task for the good actor is to know and play his role, although different roles may differ greatly in content (Simon 1957, p. 252).

Using this orientation, Simon stresses the importance of expectations in promoting cooperative behavior through coordination. "A major purpose of the planning and organizing that precedes and administrative activity," states Simon, "is not merely to put each participant in the job he [sic] can best fill, but to permit each to form accurate expectations as to what the others are going to do." The process of "informing each as to the planned activities of the others" is the very essence of coordination, while the activity that results is termed cooperative (Simon 1957, pp. 71-72; 104-105; 124).

Simon also refers to expectations in another context when he addresses the limits to rationality. He refers to the formation of expectations "of future consequences" as a primary means through which decision makers deal with the human incapacity to actually or accurately predict the future (Simon 1957, p. 68). In this sense, expectations are one of a variety of means for dealing with the uncertainty inherent in administrative situations.

Despite the centrality of expectations for Simon, he makes only limited use of the concept. Expectations emerge from his work as the media through which organizations solve their cooperation and uncertainty problems. There is no consideration of how expectations are formed or of their varying characteristics and impacts. Nor is there any discussion of the potential role of expectations in relations with extraorganizational actors.[15] Most important for our purposes, Simon fails to attribute expectations with any value as stimuli for action.[16]

In the related field of policy studies, the concept of expectations played a fundamental role in Lasswell and Kaplan's *Power and Society*, where expectations were regarded as the basis for political activity, involving the actor's perspective on "the (past, present, or future) occurrence of a state of affairs...."[17] Expectations were not the same as demands, nor were they reflections of one's identity. Rather, they stood as descriptions or matter-of-fact statements of what an individual presumed about the past, supposed about the

present, and envisioned for the future. Thus, by themselves, expectations did not seem to have the power to stir action. However, when combined with demands, expectations became a key ingredient in individual "interests"; linked to sentimental feelings about an object, expectations provided the foundation for "faith" (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950, pp. 19-25). Clearly, this view of expectations, although applied in the Lasswell-Kaplan model to political behavior, is just as relevant to the study of public administration. Just as clearly, however, their conceptualization is of limited value, for expectations by themselves do not constitute a basis for action.

The most relevant conceptualization of expectations for our purposes is found in the work of Talcott Parsons and others who worked on the development of a "general theory of action" at about the same time that Simon and Lasswell/Kaplan were developing their frameworks. Individual actions, they note, are reactions to situations and how an individual orients toward it. Each situation orientation has two dimensions—one of choice, through which the actor perceives the alternatives available to deal with the situation; and one of **expectancy,** through which the actor develops "an orientation to the future state of the situation as well as to the present" (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 68). What is distinctive about these expectancy orientations is that they were simultaneously cognitive and cathectic. That is, the orientation includes not only the actor's ability to cognitively discriminate among different expectations about the situation, but also his or her ability to attach some sense of value or significance ("a readiness to receive gratification and avoid deprivation") to the expectation (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 68). Thus, in this construct we have a direct association between expectations and action.

Another important contribution of the Parsons group was its elaboration of the distinction between situations focusing on a single individual and those involving two or more actors. In an individual-actor situation, the only relevant expectations are those of the actor. As I sit before my word processor, I have expectations about what will occur when I flip the on switch or strike a key, but the inanimate object of my actions obviously has no expectations; it merely responds as it is programmed to do. However, the situation involving two or more human actors is quite different, for it encompasses an interaction of expectations that greatly complicates the situation. What emerges is termed the **"complementarity of expectations,** not

in the sense that the expectations of the two actors with regard to each other are identical, but in the sense that the action of each is oriented to the expectation of the other" (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 15; emphasis in original).[18]

Within this broader realm of social interaction, Parsons and his colleagues focused attention on human behavior "oriented to the attainment of ends in situations, by means of the normatively regulated expenditure of energy" (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 53). Thus, to be called a *social action*, a behavior must be goal oriented ("attainment of ends"), relevant to the context of the behavior ("situations"), and based on some intelligence or logic ("normatively regulated"). Within this framework of action, expectations play a critical role in how the actor is oriented toward the situation—put briefly, expectations are part of the orientation of the actor toward the state of affairs he or she is facing (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 68).

Analytically, each person has expectations at the level of a distinct individual personality within society—what we will refer to as *personal* expectations. However, we approach a different level of analysis when we discuss the expectations of those individuals in their social roles. By definition, a "role is that organized sector of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his [or her] participation in an interactive process" (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 23). The expectations associated with different roles ("*role* expectations" in the Parsonsian scheme) reflect stabilized patterns of interaction between individuals in specific roles and other actors in society, and these are the fundamental parts of any social structure (Parsons and Shils 1951, pp. 19-20).

In studying public administration from the perspective of expectations, we are in fact focusing attention on the role expectations facing a specific set of governmental actors. More than any other actors on the public stage, public administrators have to focus on what is expected of them individually and collectively. At times those role expectations are derived from interest group activity; at times they emerge from other governmental institutions; at other times they are the creations of extrapolitical and extragovernmental circumstances. Just as critical are those expectations formed as a result of the interaction between their role expectations and their personal expectations.[19]

Consider the case of General Sands and the Army Corps of Engineers. The actions they take as public administrators are shaped by a variety of forces, but a great deal depends on the role expectations they have formed (and are continuously forming). Those role expectations will reflect their training, their socialization as members of the Army Corps, the recent history of their agency's relationships with the Pentagon, the White House, the Congress (including congressional committees and individual members of Congress), the media, and the extended list of special interests from the crawfishermen to environmentalists. In addition, their own experiences, especially along the Mississippi and Atchafalay Rivers,[20] as well as their own personal expectations (which are themselves constantly changing), will also help shape role expectations.

By accepting the need to deal with role expectations as a central premise of our framework, we have provided a working focal point for our theory-building task. Several questions are evident at the outset. Where do these expectations come from? What are the characteristics of expectations? How do public administrators and others deal with expectations? These are issues that a middle-range theory must deal with as it is applied to the field of public administration. But we cannot start with a clear slate. Some initial answers to these questions are in order, if for no other reason than to establish some conceptual and theoretical launching points.

Sources of Expectations

It would be tempting to begin our theory-building exercise by presuming the existence of expectations, for that would allow us to avoid the difficult task of searching for their sources. Reflecting on the study of the "politics of interests" which plays such a central role in American political science, Aaron Wildavsky noted that little or no attention had been paid to the sources of interests or the preferences they generate (Wildavsky 1987, p. 4). Despite the fertility and fruitfulness of interest-based theories of politics, the lack of concern for the sources of interests ultimately comes back to haunt them, thus leading Wildavsky to call for greater attention to the roots on interests (Wildavsky 1987; Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990). There are obvious advantages to considering the sources of expectations from the outset of our effort.

An equally obvious reason for considering the sources of expectations is that the origins of expectations do much to shape the characteristics of their progeny. The Army Corps, for instance, faces the naturally established expectation that the channel through which the Mississippi River flows will shift. John McPhee describes the process: "As the mouth advances southward and the river lengthens, the gradient declines, the current slows, and the sediment builds up the bed. Eventually, it builds up so much that the river spills to one side. Major shifts of that nature have tended to occur once a millennium" (McPhee 1989, p. 5). By all indications, such a shift is now underway as the Mississippi spills more and more of its flow into an increasingly steep distributary, the Atchafalaya River. Such a shift was to be expected, and one could have considered the Corps job to deal with nature—and its consequences—as it ran its shifting course.

But that is not to be, for the Corps must meet the expectations of less natural forces, such as Congress.

> For the Mississippi to make such a change was completely natural, but in the interval since the last shift Europeans had settled beside the river, a nation had developed, and the nation could not afford nature. The consequences of the Atchafalaya's conquest of the Mississippi would include but not be limited to the demise of Baton Rouge and the virtual destruction of New Orleans (McPhee 1989, p. 6).

In 1950, the U.S. Congress established a counter-expectation for the corps. Noting that the "'distribution of flow and sediment in the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers is now in desirable proportions and should be so maintained,'" Congress ordered the Corps "to preserve 1950. In perpetuity. . . , thirty percent of the latitude flow [of the Mississippi] was to pass to the Atchafalaya" (McPhee 1989, p. 11). Given the power of nature, many water resource experts have regarded the congressional mandate as pointless in the long term. The shift to the Atchafalaya "'could happen next year, during the next decade, or sometime in the next thirty or forty years. But the final outcome is simply a matter of time and it is only prudent to prepare for it.'" But as McPhee notes, despite the obvious mismatch between nature and Congress, the Corps could not allow the expected outcome to influence its job. Its reaction to the inevitable victory of natural forces was not based on hard evidence, but rather on the
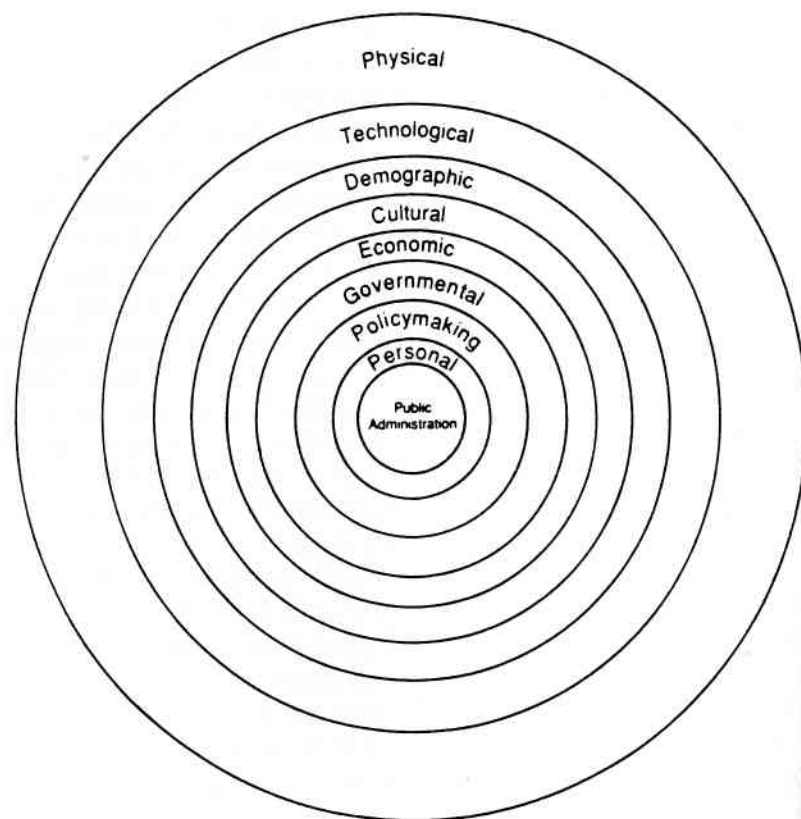
priority it gives to the expectations of Congress. "The Corps thought differently, saying 'We can't let that happen. We are charged by Congress not to let that happen'" (McPhee 1989, p. 12).

Because the question of the source of expectations is an empirical one, our initial step is to develop a simple working model of sources that can facilitate our studies. For this we turn to the frequently-cited observation by John Gaus that public administration is built "quite literally from the ground up, from the elements of place—soils, climate, location, for example—to the people who live there—their numbers and ages and knowledge and ways of physical and social technology by which from the place and in relationships with one another, they get their living" (Gaus 1947, p. 1). Building on Gaus' comments, an eight dimensional "ecological perspective" was developed to help categorize potential sources of expectations. As illustrated in Figure 1, it covers a wide range of potential source categories: physical, technological, demographic, cultural, economic, governmental, policy making, and personal.

This simple model serves both pedagogical and heuristic purposes. Pedagogically, it provides students with a broad view of the factors that are important in the work of public administrators, for too often their attention is focused exclusively on governmental, political, and perhaps organizational factors (Dubnick and Romzek 1991, chapter 4). More important for present purposes, the model serves as a useful heuristic device to remind researchers that the sources of expectations are multiple and interactive.

The issue of sources, however, will not be addressed by merely categorizing them. There are at least three other questions to answer. First, how are expectations facing public administration influenced by the interaction of the various sources? In its simplest form, this interaction at a given point in time and place can be called the "situation," and as Wilson (1989, pp. 36-44) has shown, situations can generate their own powerful imperatives.

Second, are all sources of equal importance? And if not, which ones are most salient? Clearly, sources vary in importance, as exemplified by the priority given by the Corps to congressional mandates. As to which one is most important, our initial work has implied the importance of the "personal dimension" by noting that individual administrators "often act as filters through which must pass all of the various expectations. . ." (Dubnick and Romzek 1991, p. 214). We must note that these personal factors are shaped by

Circle labels from outer to inner: Physical, Technological, Demographic, Cultural, Economic, Governmental, Policymaking, Personal, Public Administration

Source: Dubnick and Romzek (1991, p. 94).

Figure 1.   The Ecological Perspective of Public Administration

culture. The work by Wildavsky and others on the role of culture in shaping human preferences argues for a strong impact of culture on the personal dimension (see Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990).

Third, we need to know more about the dynamic processes through which expectations are formed and communicated. There is a vast classic literature on this as it relates to organization management (e.g., Barnard 1938; Kaufman 1973; Simon 1957), but its applicability to the broader context of expectations formation and adoption seems limited. What we do know is that expectations are products of social

relationships, and that their creation, communication, and adoption are directly related to social interactions. Thus, a broader perspective is needed, and for that we might find the "structuration" theory of sociologist Anthony Giddens more helpful.[21] In explaining human behavior, Giddens posits three key components of social action: the reflexive monitoring of conduct by which individuals continually assess their actions; the rationalization of conduct by which individuals offer explanations of their actions; and the motivation of conduct by which individual actions can be linked to a system of conscious and unconscious wants (Giddens 1984, pp. 1-14). Expectations seem well suited as a key component of the mechanisms through which the actions of public administrators can be assessed, explained, and linked to motivations.

Key Characteristics

Beyond the need to understand where expectations come from, it is critical for our theory-building efforts to include some conceptual means for differentiating among expectations. The task of developing meaningful and useful concepts to characterize expectations is a difficult one since there is no theory of expectations to build from. In this sense, we face what Abraham Kaplan has termed the "paradox of conceptualization": "The proper concepts are needed to formulate a good theory, but we need a good theory to arrive at the proper concepts" (Kaplan 1964, p. 53). In lieu of a good theory from which to pull conceptual characterizations of expectations, we will rely on a set of "provisional" concepts that will allow us to approximate the various dimensions of expectations. Testing them through application, we will be able to adjust and adapt these concepts over time (Kaplan 1964, p. 53-54).

For present purposes, we highlight eleven provisional characteristics of expectations (see Table 1). While not an exhaustive list of possible characterizations, they do include qualities which relate to some historical controversies in American public administration.[22]

Number

An obvious first characteristic involves the **number** of expectations relevant to the work of any public administrator, which can hypothetically vary from one to infinity. Given the number of

Table 1. Characteristics of Expectations

Dimension	Focus	Strategies
Number	The quantity of expectations in a set influencing an administrator or agency.	Reduce/Increase
Scope	The quantitative range of behaviors addressed by the expectations.	Narrow/expand
Depth	Degree of specificity of behaviors covered by the expectations.	Specify/broaden
Translucence	The clarity of meaning in the expectations.	Clarify/obfuscate
Diversity	The qualitative range of behaviors addressed by the expectations.	Homogenize/differentiate
Structure	The arrangement of component parts of a set of expectations reflected in priority order.	Equalize/Prioritize
Intensity	The degree of cathectic, i.e., emotional, attachment to an expectation or set of expectations.	Lower/raise
Temporality	The time factor associated with specific expectations reflecting variations in perceptions about when an expected state of affairs should be reached.	Shorten/lengthen
Tractability	The extent to which the expectation or set or expectations can be handled, managed, etc.	Facilitate/impede
Consistency	The stability and invariability of a set of expectations over time and space dimensions.	Stabilize/destabilize
Interrelatedness	The degree of interdependence among the component parts of a set of expectations.	Link/disaggregate

potential sources (see above), it is unlikely that many public administrators operate under conditions involving a low number of expectations.

As a management problem, the number of expectations facing public administration has been a central issue in the intellectual development of the field. Under the ideals associated with the classical school of public administration, it was desirable to create a situation whereby the number of expectations imposed on administrators was minimal, and this (they believed) could be accomplished through centralized, simplified, and unified administrative institutions that centralized, simplified, and unified administrative activities (Waldo 1984, chapter 8). Later analysts accepted the inevitability—if not desirability—of a situation where the number of expectations were limited only by the number of interests concerned with administrative functions and tasks (Redford 1968). Thus, the management of expectations could be regarded in part as the task

of regulating (e.g., increasing, decreasing, holding constant) the number of expectations having a real or potential impact on the work of government administrators and agencies.

Scope

Expectations relevant for public administration typically focus on the behavior or priorities of government workers and agencies. This focus can be narrowly defined and limited in the range of behaviors and priorities it covers, or it can cover a wide range of actions and values. These variations are reflected in the characteristic of **scope.**

It is likely that every public administrator faces a mixture of narrowly- and broadly-focused expectations. Expectations concentrating on the unique responsibilities or idiosyncratic tasks of a specific public sector position are manifested in detailed job descriptions or employment contracts (see Dubnick and Romzek 1991, pp. 295-302). At the same time, the general obligations of a government employee to provide due process and uphold the constitutional and legal requirements of government administration are constantly and increasingly asserted and enforced by and through the courts (see Rosenbloom 1987).

The appropriate management of the scope of expectations is, of course, an issue that has been debated for decades. Some have argued that, for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness, the expectations for public administrators should be limited to or focused on those relevant to the task or function that was assigned. If you want a neighborhood free from crime, or if you want the war successfully completed as quickly as possible, you should keep the expectations narrowly defined and focused on the immediate goals that you have assigned to the law enforcers or military services respectively.

In contrast, others have argued for a broader scope of expectations based on the "public" nature of the government administrative enterprise (Appleby 1945). That is, inherent in the governmental enterprise are sets of expectations that are inescapably attached to any more specialized set of tasks or functions. It is not enough to say that a police officer engages in law enforcement activities or a soldier engages in battlefield operations. The very fact that each is a public employee broadens the scope of the expectations to be managed.

Depth

How specific and detailed are the expectations we have regarding the behavior and priorities of public employees and their agencies? The answers to that question can be arrayed along a continuum. At one extreme are expectations that provide specific instructions and standards for administrators, while at the other extreme are ambiguous expectations that provide only the most superficial guidance. The differences are matters of **depth** or specificity.

As with number and scope, controversy has surrounded discussions of what constitutes the appropriate depth for expectations in public administration. On one side are those who defend or favor the growth of administrative discretion in American public administration. Increasing discretion is a reflection of decreasing depth or specificity in the expectations applied to public administration. Advocates of this position put much stock in the judgments and abilities of public administrators, or at least in the necessity of deferring to public administration decision makers in light of technical or political factors (Woll 1963). On the other side of the debate are those who argue for less discretion through legal and constitutional standards that provide more specific guidance and impose more stringent limitations on administrative activities. Such proponents argue for greater depth to the expectations imposed on government workers (Lowi 1979).

As in most controversies surrounding public administration, here too stands a middle ground—one accepting the inevitability of administrative discretion while being attentive to the potential for abuses (Davis 1976). Focusing on the depth of expectations, this balance might entail greater legislative and judicial concern for the substance of the statutory authority under which agencies operate. In some instances, greater detail might be in order, as in income tax legislation where preciseness is a desirable attribute even from the perspective of government revenue department personnel. In other instances, too much detail can place a burden on the accomplishment of agency missions; only the most general "marching orders" might be appropriate, as in President Kennedy's 1961 request that Congress authorize a program to land an American on the moon "before this decade is out. . . ."[23] Again, one can think of these alternatives as part of the broad challenge of managing expectations for public administration.

Translucence

The **translucence** or clarity of expectations is often subject to the same discussions. An expectation that is specific is more likely to be clear in meaning than one that lacks depth, as defined here. But a general marching order need not be ambiguous merely because it lacks specificity. While leaving much detail for program implementors, the mandate to land an American on the moon by the end of the 1960s was unambiguous in its intent and objectives. Thus, the clarity of expectations can be regarded as a distinct characteristic of expectations.

Controversies surrounding the clarity of expectations have been both policy and managerially based. In terms of public policy, the translucence of expectations is as central to the debate over bureaucratic discretion as is their specificity. As noted, this reflects the close correlationship between expectation clarity and specificity in many circumstances. Yet even here there is a major difference, for while the call for greater specificity in expectations tends to focus on the need for more detailed instructions on *how* (i.e., the process by which) a task is to be carried out, the characteristic of translucence highlights the *meaning* of a mandate. For example, expectations are highly translucent when a legislative enactment clearly states the intentions and goals of a program without necessarily detailing the technologies or procedures for carrying out programmatic functions. It is one thing for policymakers to state a clear goal of "cleaning the air," but quite a different situation emerges when they provide detailed instructions. Analyses of efforts to implement the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970 described a situation in which legislative expectations were more than clear—they were also characterized by a depth that proved problematic for administrators at the Environmental Protection Agency (see e.g., Jones 1975; Marcus 1980). It is in this sense important to distinguish between translucence and depth of expectations.

On the managerial level, the call for clearly articulated goals and objectives have been central to the management-by-objectives (MBO) and related movements to improve public and private organizations. Underlying these approaches is the belief (supported by some empirical evidence) that clear goals and objectives enhance worker performance (see Miner 1980, chapter 7). While few would argue the logic of this premise, they might question the feasibility and wisdom

of forcing such clarity in situations where organization members face ambiguous conditions. There are also problems derived from the behavior-distorting effects of imposing clear goals, objectives, or performance targets on a group of workers whose overall mission reflects a diverse agenda. Focusing the attention of local law enforcement officers on issuing traffic tickets might satisfy some urge for greater productivity, but it may divert resources and effort from crime prevention or other policing tasks.

Diversity

Closely related to the previous characteristics of expectations is the fact that they can, and often do, cover a potentially wide range of subjects—reflected in the characteristic of **diversity**. Clearly, public administrators are likely to face many expectations (number) covering a wide range of administrative behaviors and values (scope). But one can hardly ignore the potential for a "qualitative range" of those expectations. Some agencies face many expectations covering a wide range of actions that concentrate around the primary mission or values of the agency. That is, the expectations do not diverge too far from the core objectives or norms of the agency. A local police department that is expected to focus its efforts on enforcing laws or solving crimes is facing a less diverse set of expectations than a neighboring police force that is also expected to take an active role in bridging racial or ethnic divisions within the community.

Recently, America's public schools have been at the center of a debate focusing on what we term the diversity of expectations. Many contemporary critics of our public educational systems claim that we are asking them to do too much. "Almost everyone's first impulse is to think that the purpose of schools is to provide children with academic training," argue Chubb and Moe (1990). But the reality is that we often require much more. We expect public schools to educate our children in a way that is supportive and respectful of individual student differences. We also want schools to provide our kids with a social life, to make them more tolerant and less anti-social, more patriotic and conformist, more critical and individualistic, more "marketable" in our economy, more cultured, and so on ad infinitum. Thus, our schools are expected to provide for more than our children's academic needs; they must also deal with a qualitatively disparate list of expectations, some having little or no relationship

to academic training. "On reflection, . . . it should be apparent that schools have no immutable or transcendent purpose. What they are supposed to be doing depends on who controls them and what those controllers want them to do" (Chubb and Moe 1990, p. 30). In short, the expectations they face are diverse beyond the primary or core expectations related to educating students.

It should come as no surprise that the value of diversity in public administration expectations is no less controversial than other characteristics. At one extreme is Drucker (among others) who contends that government agencies "will malperform if an activity is under pressure to satisfy different constituencies with different values and different demands. Performance requires concentration on one goal. It requires setting priorities and sticking to them" (Drucker 1989, p. 66). At the other extreme are those who insist that the very reason for relying on public administration to perform a societal task is found in government's commitment to ends and means that transcend any particular function. From this perspective, the rationale for turning to government to conduct a part of society's business goes beyond mere "market failure." It reflects a belief that government will operate under a more diverse set of expectations than the non-governmental sphere. This view was central to the "New Public Administration" movement which posited a cross-cutting concern for social equity among government agencies (Marini 1971). In broader strokes, Fried (1976) has argued that public administrators operate under three major and pervasive sets of performance ethics dealing with legal (liberalism), democratic (responsiveness), and operational (effectiveness) obligations.

Between the two extremes is the arena in which attempts are made to manage the diversity of expectations. Few if any public agencies—including the most financially and politically autonomous (e.g., public sector corporations)—escape the constraints of the legal, social, and environmental obligations that pervade the contemporary public sector. At the same time, those obligations have rarely posed insurmountable obstacles to agency operations. Public administrators are, in this sense, constantly engaged in the management of expectation diversity (see Schuman 1976).

Structure

Not all expectations are equal, whether to the public administrator or those interested in his or her activities. If we think in terms of

"sets" of expectations that influence public administrators at any point in time, then we must be concerned with the relative structure and intensity of each within that set.

By **structure**, we mean the priority given to component parts of each set of expectations. We can imagine that each public administrator faces a hierarchy of expectations at any moment in which demands and pressures are arrayed in order of perceived or imposed importance. This order can be shaped by a variety of factors. Sometimes, media coverage determines priorities. Thus, during times when the public is hearing about high crime level in the center city through media coverage, a police chief is under pressure to stress actions that will prevent a further increase or lead to a reduction in those incidents. Well publicized instances of police brutality may shift the focus of attention to different types of activities aimed at preventing such charges from arising in the future. At other times, the fiscal health of the city will determine priorities. Should the limited resources of the fire department be placed in keeping more firefighters employed, or should it go to better equipment? The response depends on the structure of expectations surrounding the agency.

There are analysts who argue that public administrators must always give priority to upholding the constitution or obeying the law,[24] while there are others who believe there is no fixed structure to expectations and that order must be determined through organizational or leadership processes (Barnard 1938, chapter XVII). Perhaps the most significant debates over priorities arise when two legitimate expectation structures clash, as was the case in the Iran-*contra* affair. The priority Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North gave to his obligation to carrying out the orders of his superiors, especially his commander-in-chief, was in direct conflict to the view of his accusers that his top priority should have been obedience to the law of the land.

Intensity

The characteristic of **intensity** posits another variable that challenges the ability of public administrators to manage expectations. The public administrator is subject to expectations of varying intensity. A neighborhood demand for a traffic light at an intersection where a child was recently killed is likely to draw more attention than the mere submission of a formal request for a signal that has been winding its way through the process for several months. There is likely to be a greater sense of urgency among public administrators when faced with high-intensity expectations, and those who are the source of the intense expectations are more likely to promote or defend exceptional (e.g., "cutting through the red tape") and perhaps excessive behavior on the part of government workers. At the same time, there is a premise of bureaucratic behavior that reflects a disdain for actions based on sympathy or compassion (Thompson 1975). The management of expectation intensity is clearly a difficult challenge, since intensity is rooted in the source of the expectation. It might be feasible to help direct or shape the level of expectation intensity in ways that are helpful to the agency, but there is too little written on this factor to allow more than speculative conclusions.

Temporality

While expectation structure and intensity can be assessed at a particular point in time, we must also take into account the expectation's **temporality**—that is, how the expectation relates to time. Time is a constraining and defining factor in modern social life (see Mumford 1962, pp. 196-199). It is a central factor in many aspects of organized life in both the public and private sectors. The timing of organizational processes—in terms of sequential ordering, scheduling, and pacing—is at the heart of mass production technologies and the coordination of service delivery. In that sense, temporal factors have become a key tool for organizing and managing behavior. Relatedly, time has emerged as a measure and standard of performance (Averch 1990, pp. 20-21), thus becoming an important characteristic of expectations.

Despite its obvious importance, the actual role of temporal factors in public administration has not been systematically explored in great detail. Administrators often face implied or explicit expectations of timeliness, ranging from the general public's annoyance if mass transit systems do not "run on time" to clear goals such as the presidential mandate for NASA to land an American on the moon by 1970. Many expectations characterized by a time dimension can be addressed by a variety of predictive and prescriptive managerial techniques.[25] But beyond prescriptive studies on the optimal use of

time, little is known of how public administrators cope with expectation temporality.

Tractability

Another significant characteristic of expectations relates to the issue of whether an expectation can be carried out or met—whether it is tractable. **Tractability** is not merely a matter of whether someone or some group is expecting public administrators to accomplish the technically or fiscally impossible. There are times when administrators do face literally impossible tasks, but many times the symbolic act of attempting to deal with the tractable gives comfort to the public. Government geologists cannot prevent earthquakes, nor can government meteorologists prevent droughts. But the fact that government is either conducting or funding research on both topics meets some expectations, although what is likely to emerge from such efforts is a greater capacity to predict those disasters.

Just as important is the expectation that government administrators do something that is within the realm of possibility, but which is intractable for organizational, political, economic, and other reasons. Recent analyses of "impossible jobs" in public administration are relevant in this regard (Hargrove and Glidewell 1990). Focusing on such factors as clientele legitimacy, intensity of conflict among constituencies, public confidence in the administrator's profession, and strength of the "agency myth" which helps guide administrative behavior, Glidewell and Hargrove (1990, pp. 3-45) prescribe "coping strategies" in lieu of efforts to master or control the tasks they face. Generalizing to the issue of expectations, the tractability of a set of expectations is also likely to shape the operations of a public agency and its employees. Being able to manage expectation tractability—through changing the factors that cause it as well as through coping strategies—is one of the understudied dimensions of public administration life.

Consistency

The **consistency** of expectations facing public administrators is one of the more salient characteristics among the nine discussed here. Expectations can be—and in an ideal world, should be—consistent. Due to the extrinsic characteristics discussed above (i.e., number,

diversity), it is probable that sets of expectations facing public administrators will contain conflicting and contradictory components.

The problems of consistency typically have their origin in unclear goals, but goal ambiguity is not necessarily the cause of expectation inconsistency. Unclear agency goals provides fertile soil for alternative expectations to take root, but even clear mission statements and detailed agency objectives cannot overcome situational factors which can overwhelm public administrators. Wilson offers many examples of this in his examination of bureaucratic "operators": police officers learn that "handling the situation" and "taking charge" frequently eclipses their official obligation to "enforce the law"; correctional officers know that asserting control over the prison population is as important as rehabilitation or deterrence; soldiers find that living up to the expectations of their peers in the field is at times more important than following orders from headquarters (Wilson 1989, chapter 3). Thus, it would be an error to think that the problems of public administration will be resolved with clearer or more detailed goals. A more productive approach would be to consider how agency missions and goals fit into the overall set of expectations, and how the consistency of these expectations are managed by the agency.

Interrelatedness

The management of expectation consistency can take many forms—from imposing a structure among expectations through mechanisms such as oversight or personnel socialization, to changing the circumstances that generate potential inconsistencies.[26] One factor that can complicate such management efforts is the **interrelatedness** of the expectations an agency or administrator must contend with. To the extent that the component parts of a set of expectations are interrelated, the management of one is likely to influence the management of others in the set. A police officer who forgets to read a suspect his or her Miranda rights is violating one specific expectation, but that violation can result in the termination of the case against a suspect. Recent or future Court decisions that redefine and perhaps loosen that expectation—reduce its interrelatedness with other expectations in criminal law procedures—

will have an impact on the behavior of the police, prosecutors, judges, and others in the justice system.

As noted at the outset of this discussion, these eleven characteristics of expectations—number, scope, depth, translucence, diversity, structure, intensity, temporality, tractability, consistency, and interrelatedness—do not constitute a comprehensive list of the factors which shape public administration expectations. They do represent, however, a preliminary list of characteristics that can help us launch our theory-building efforts.

How To Deal With Expectations

Thus far we have established our intent to develop a middle-range theory focused on the idea that dealing with expectations is central to the work and world of public administration. We built on that point by laying the groundwork for examining the sources and eleven key characteristics of expectations. We now turn our attention to how the penchant for dealing with expectations manifests itself in actions taken by public administrators and their agencies.

Here, again, it must be stressed that our purpose is not to elaborate a theory, but to launch a theory-building effort. In very general terms, each characteristic of expectations provides simple "levers" for action, as summarized in the third column of Table 1. Thus, the number of expectations can be reduced or increased, the scope of each narrowed or expanded, and so on. Which direction the individual levers should be pulled is determined by the particular situation, and thus remains a strategic or tactical question subject to a more fully developed theory rather than a theory-building issue. The challenging theory-building question focuses on why certain approaches are used to cope with various expectations.

The major difficulty we face here is rooted in the fact that expectations can be "handled" at various levels of social action. For example, expectations are often the subject of individual treatment, thus leading us to concepts and theories related to human problem solving and decision making (Janis and Mann 1977). At a different level, groups of individuals contend with expectations, their efforts ranging from unstructured collective behavior (Smelser 1962) to actions taken through more formally structured organizations (Silverman 1970). At still another level, institutions form the basis for dealing with expectations—institutions that represent rules and

resources within a social context that extend over time and space (Giddens 1984, chapter 1).

As an alternative to relying on these theoretical constructs, we can also turn to observations derived from previous studies of how expectations are handled at each level. At the individual level, Sayre and Kaufman's study of *Governing New York City* provides some relevant and useful insights. In considering administrators of line agencies, they observe that

> A line agency head is not in a risk-free situation. He cannot make decisions as he pleases, without reference to the field of forces in which he operates, if he does not wish to jeopardize the position of his agency, his own career, or the programs and projects to which he is personally, professionally, and organizationally committed. He cannot disregard decisions made elsewhere in the governmental system for the same reasons. To impress his own preferences on the decision making process, or to even merely prevent policies unacceptable to him from being adopted, he must learn to deal with the world in which he lives. In other words, he must learn to use his considerable resources to produce the kinds of decisions he wants and needs. He must formulate strategies that make the most of his opportunities and minimize his hazards. He must be a manipulator, or he will become an instrument in the hands of others and possibly pay high costs as a consequence (Sayre and Kaufman 1965, pp. 250-251).

The strategies the agency head relies on are summarized by Sayre and Kaufman under the headings of internal and external control, and together they amount to a complex set of tasks. "With so many factors to keep in mind and so many different kinds of demands to contend with," they state, "the life of the line agency chief in the city is not an easy one" (Sayre and Kaufman 1965, p. 263). Equally important is the observation that unless the administrator takes on the role of "manipulator," someone else will. Applying this lesson to our model, unless an administrator manages the expectations surrounding his or her role, someone else will do it.

On the organizational level, the work of Kaufman is once again preeminent. The purpose of his classic study of *The Forest Ranger* was to discover how an agency meets the challenges posed by size, complexity, and the various "impulses toward disintegration" that seemed inherent in the U.S. Forest Service. What he discovered was that the Forest Service met these challenges, primarily through organizational means. Administrative procedures, personnel policies and strong socialization mechanisms, directives and inspections,

reporting requirements, and so forth, all came into play. In the end, Kaufman concludes that the accomplishments of these strategies are ongoing and ever changing, especially as the conditions under which the Rangers operate change.

> ...[E]ver-changing conditions mean the methods of one decade may not suffice in another. The challenges to unity never disappear; they can only be held in abeyance. The Forest Service has succeeded in suppressing them by attacking each one as it develops. Every tendency toward fragmentation has been met by a strategy to nullify it. Each centrifugal thrust has been counterbalanced (Kaufman 1960, p. 209).

To a considerable extent, what Kaufman regarded as the challenge of centrifugal forces we would term the ongoing management of expectations. And as Kaufman predicted, the organizational means for dealing with those forces/expectations changed as the environment of the Forest Service changed. A recent attempt to update the analysis of the Forest Service shows how the organizational world of the Rangers has met the many challenges posed by a more complex and turbulent environment. The Rangers of Kaufman's time (the 1950s) had to face expectations that stressed efficiency and economy. Those expectations remain high today, but added to them is a strong emphasis on the need for greater responsiveness and representativeness. These added expectations have been met, in part, through changes in the very administrative procedures and personnel policies that led to Kaufman's positive assessment thirty years ago (Tipple and Wellman 1991).

Finally, at the institutional level, dealing with expectations amounts to contending with role expectations that extend beyond specific situations. At a very general level, these institutionally relevant expectations involve obligations, responsibilities, and standards established by the broader social system to apply over an enlarged area of space and time. The obligation of public servants to uphold the constitution, the generalized responsibility to serve the interest of agency clientele, the demand that government programs operate efficiently—all are part of the expectations that emerge at the institutional level and can be managed at that general level.

Perhaps no set of general expectations weighs more heavily on public administrators than those generated by an attentive and potentially hostile public. Keeping the "public" on your side can prove

critical in some cases. Institutionally, a relevant case in point was the way the Pentagon, under the leadership of Colin Powell, handled public expectations surrounding the Persian Gulf War. The victory in that 42-day war (38 in the air, 4 days on the ground) was shaped as much in the media as it was on the battlefield. By the time ground forces had started their moves, the expectations were for an extended affair that might cost many American lives. The shortness of the war and the relatively low numbers of casualties—many of them the result of "friendly fire" rather than enemy action—was well below what had been expected. Put more bluntly, it was well below what the Pentagon had led the public to believe. This was no accident, but rather reflected a conscious effort to manage the expectations of the American public.

The decision to manage public expectations at the institutional level was not something that emerged during the preparation for the war against Iraq. Instead, it had its roots in the Pentagon's constant reflections on what went wrong in Vietnam. The awareness that it was important to maintain public support for any extended war effort came too late in the Vietnam War (see Sheehan 1988, pp. 690-699), but the lessons learned from that experience were not forgotten. They were made most explicit in a speech given by General Powell on December 13, 1989 before officers attending the National Defense University. "He spoke at length about the responsibility of the modern military officer to understand the political and media components of their jobs."

> The Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] described how he worked on his relationships with reporters so that they trusted him and accepted his explanations of events. "Once you've got all the forces moving and everything's being taken care of by the commanders," he said, "turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war if you don't handle the story right" (Woodward 1991, p. 155).

At a more specific level, institutional means for handling expectations can be analyzed as "codes" governing relationships between the public administrators and others. This is the approach used by Gray and Jenkins (1985) in their analysis of British administrative politics. They describe the relationship between civil servants and their ministerial superiors as one of "stewardship."[27]

Stewardship involves two manifest parties: a steward or accountor, that is, the party to whom the stewardship or responsibility is given and who is obliged to present an account of its execution, and the principal or accountee, that is, the party entrusting the responsibility to the steward and to whom the account is presented. There is however a third party in this relationship: the codes on the basis of which the relationship is struck and by which it is maintained and adjudicated (Gray and Jenkins 1985, p. 138).

They define a "code of accountability" as "a system of signals, meanings and customs which binds the parties in a stewardship relation and governs the liability of the steward to present an account of the conduct of his stewardship" (Gray and Jenkins 1985, p. 140). Through their elaboration of this model, we discover that these codes can be explicit or implicit, outcome or process based, symbolic or substantive. Although constantly changing, the codes offer public administrators an institutionalized mechanism for dealing with the expectations of specific sets of actors. Gray and Jenkins offer cases demonstrating the role of codes in the institutionalized relations between cabinet ministers and their civil service subordinates, and similar cases can be drawn from the U.S. experience.

Research into the "handling" of expectations at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels will likely lead us to explore the interaction among the three levels. To what extent do institutional strategies for managing expectations shape or rely on organizational and individual strategies, and vice versa? Are the means for dealing with expectations "nested"; that is, are individual strategies carried out within organizational contexts which, in turn, are shaped by institutional approaches?

CONCLUSION . . . AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this paper we explored the central role of expectations in public administration. Our intent is to provide the foundations for a middle-range theory that informs our understanding about the dynamics of public administration and those who work in the field. The central premise is that much of what occurs in public administration can be traced to the need of public administrators to deal with situations that typically involve multiple, diverse, and often contradictory expectations.

There are many potential implications of this effort, but none more important than those concerning our general approach to the reform and design of public management strategies. If our research supports the contention that multiple, diverse, and conflicting expectations are an inherent characteristic of public sector work, a number of widely accepted remedies for the "malperformance" of public administration need to be questioned. The continuous call for more narrowly defined expectations through clarity of objectives or centralization of authority may be called into question.

The situation is analogous to James Madison's observations in *Federalist No. 10* on factions. If multiple, diverse and conflicting expectations are as inherent to public administration as factions are to politics, then we have two choices. We can either strive to eliminate or reduce those expectations, or we can work on the development of structures and strategies that acknowledge and take advantage of the need to cope with expectations. The choice may not be as clear cut as the Madisonian options, but the wisdom of working with the situation—rather than attempting to radically alter it—is more inviting.

For example, the popularity of "privatization" as a strategy of reform reflects the continuing strength of the traditional view of public administration malperformance. According to this view, there are two ways of handling the production and delivery of many public services: through public sector bureaucracies or through private firms. For advocates of privatization, the provision of those services by public bureaucracies is inherently inefficient, in part due to the incompetencies of bureaucrats and in part due to the bias of special interest pressures which determine bureaucratic behavior. Focusing on the latter point, the call for privatization is thus linked to the same logic that calls for centralized authority—that is, both reduce or narrow the expectations considered in the provision of the service.

Is the privatization cure of reducing or narrowing expectations worth the costs to be paid? By relying on privatization, might we not be surrendering public values such as equality and need to the more limited criteria of market justice (Lane 1986)? Might we not be placing constitutional rights (Sullivan 1987), citizen participation (Morgan and England 1988), and the very sovereignty of government (Moe 1987) in jeopardy? More important, are we relying on the private sector to do something it is not capable of doing—that is, handling "public tasks"?

There is a large element of nonsense in the privatization debate. Proponents are fond of invoking the efficiency that characterizes well-run companies in competitive markets and then, not troubling with any intervening logical steps, trumpeting the conclusion that private firms will excel in public undertakings as well. To go from the observation that private companies tend to do what they do better than public agencies, to the assertion that companies should take over the agencies' duties, is rather like observing that the clients of exercise spas are healthier, on average, than the clients of hospitals, and concluding from this that workout coaches should take over for doctors. Public tasks are different, and mostly harder (Donahue 1989, p. 215).

By providing a framework for understanding public administration as the management of expectations, we can open the door to an alternative perspective, one stressing the design of more appropriate public sector structures and strategies rather than the abandonment of the public for the private sphere.

In short, the development of a middle-range of public administration built around an expectations framework holds considerable promise in the form of opportunities. Descriptively, it holds the opportunity of giving us an empirically-rooted basis for portraying what public administrators do in various contexts. As a theory, it holds considerable promise as a foundation for explaining why public administrators do what they do. Implied in the framework are some criteria by which administrative actions can be assessed, as well as some guidelines for prescribing changes in administrative behavior or strategies or reforms that will enhance (and hopefully improve) government administration. More immediately, the next step in this theory-building process is the development of propositions linking the characteristics of expectations and the individual, organizational, and institutional mechanisms for dealing with those expectations.

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NOTES

1. Also see Rosen (1989) and Yates (1982).
2. Also see Dubnick and Romzek (1991).
3. See Hirschman (1958), for an example of how the search for the *primum mobile* influenced the field of economics.
4. For example, the question of "what" public administration theory should encompass that Dwight Waldo raised in his 1948 classic, *The Administrative State*, was still central to his comments on public administration theory in 1990. Compare his comments in Waldo (1984) (originally published in 1948) with those expressed in Waldo (1990).
5. David H. Rosenbloom noted this when he observed that Wilson's "intellectual path and that of public administration seem to parallel each other more, and to intersect less, than one might reasonably expect." A cursory examination of references used in *Bureaucracy* shows that Wilson "omits reference to a number of scholars whose work has framed contemporary public administration." Similarly, "Several 'state of the art' volumes in public administration scarcely cite Wilson's contributions...." See Rosenbloom 1991, p. 191.
6. For example, see Kaufman 1960; various publications generated by "the Oakland Project," such as Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), and Levy, Meltsner and Wildavsky (1974), Wilson (1973), Derthick (1979, 1990), and Hargrove and Glidewell (1990).
7. Lane (1990) uses the label "concrete theory" to distinguish this variant of Merton's middle-range theory.
8. Lane does not include "fictional individuals" in her list of unstressed focal points, but its deemphasis is implied in the discussion of the second attribute (see below).
9. Contractors and others who are recruited to do the work of public administrators.
10. Note that there are numerous qualifiers ("most of the time"; "much of their behavior") attached to these statements. This is congruent with the "means-ends" approach that assumes that "human beings are seldom that consistent. In some situations they will be deflected from their objectives by Freudian-type emotional factors, while in others they will fail to pursue any well-defined objectives altogether." Harsanyi (1986, p. 84).
11. The study was initiated in 1948, and the first edition of the work was published in 1955.
12. Which is cited as an "exemplar" of concrete theory; Lane (1990, pp. 933-934).
13. The fact that the concrete theory approach relies heavily on case study methodologies may be regarded by some as a major drawback to this approach. For others, however, case study methodologies hold significant promise. See Agranoff and Radin (1991), also Bailey (1992).
14. For an approach to public sector management focusing on the use of "coping" strategies, see Glidewell and Hargrove (1990).

15.   Thompson (1967) implies an important and similar role for expectations in task environment relations in his discussion of the "Domains of Organized Action": "Domain consensus defines a set of expectations both for members of an organization and for others with whom they interact, about what the organization will or will not do." (p. 29)

16.   Interestingly, later works by Simon do not use the expectations concept as it is applied in *Administrative Behavior*, which was originally published in 1947. For instance, a discussion of coordination published a decade later (March and Simon 1958, pp. 25-29) makes no reference to expectations in its elaboration of essentially the same phenomenon. Nor does the term "expectations" show up as a prominent concept in an extended discussion of how organizations "absorb uncertainty" (March and Simon 1958, pp. 164-166). Simon does return to a discussion of expectations in a 1969 work on "Economic Rationality" (see Simon 1981, pp. 44-47), but here he limits his discussion to the role expectations play in economic choice and game-theory situations.

17.   "The persons active in politics make demands for values (on themselves and others) on the basis of various expectations." See Lasswell and Kaplan (1950, pp. 16, 21).

18.   The salience of this social condition for the general theory of action is evident in the following statement offered at the conclusion of their theory-building effort: "It is through the complementarity of expectations in interaction that the symbols essential to human action are built up, that communication on the humanly significant levels, and therefore culture, become possible" (Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 235).

19.   Within administrative behavior, scholars have addressed the issue of employees' expectations regarding their own performance and likely rewards under the rubric of "expectancy theories." See Miner (1980: chapter 6).

20.   During the journey that author McPhee took with General Sands, the towboat was pulled from the Mississippi and into the Atchafalaya by the force of the shifting river currents.

21.   It is at this point that we abandon our commitment to the framework of Parsons and Shils (1951, pp. 23-24) which stresses the means by which social structure and role expectations control social behavior by minimizing deviations.

22.   Perry's (1991, p. 10) call for a middle-range theory includes a criterion that the focal-point phenomena of such a theory "should be grounded in the history of public administration"; that is, it should be relevant to the "classic concerns" of the field.

23.   As any student of congressional and legislative actions can attest, the lack of depth in the "statutory" expectations should not be attributed merely to the wisdom of legislators. Ambiguity can result from the need for political compromise, uncertainty about causes or consequences, the lack of preciseness in our language, and so on. See discussion in Gortner (1991, pp. 63-66).

24.   Rohr (1986, p. 181), for example, argues that public administrators should "use their discretionary power in order to maintain the constitutional balance of powers in support of individual rights."

25.   For example, Nagel (1982, Part V) provides an overview of three prescriptive time-optimizing techniques (queueing, sequencing, and critical path theory) and three predictive methods (probability, trend lines, difference/differential equations).

26.   Wilson offers the example of how mental health hospital attendants were able to concentrate more on the primary mission of their institutions with the advent of acceptable drug therapies. See Wilson (1989, p. 39).

27.   This stewardship framework is similar in form to the principal-agent model now widely used in the study of bureaucratic politics by political scientists as well as economists (see Moe 1984), but the centrality of "codes" in their model makes the Gray and Jenkins approach more suitable for our purposes.

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