

examine the development of his projects without being struck by the tremendous power of his work and the conclusion that there surely must have been a grand strategy that shaped it.

In fact, Kaufman explains, much of what developed was the product of chance: his undergraduate course with Walter Sharp in public administration; his encounter with Herbert Simon and a lunchtime conversation that followed; the encouragement of Luther Gulick to tackle a dissertation on an arcane topic like the US Forest Service; his stumble into teaching at City College, which led to an opportunity at Yale; and then the doors that opened at Brookings. The boy who wanted to be a lawyer and did not find political science much fun, discovered a knack for seizing lucky opportunities at the most fortunate times.

Of course, even a casual paging through his work demonstrates quite clearly that his amazing contributions are the product of much more than luck. His genius is more than happenstance, even if his typically self-deprecating tales might make it seem that way.

For those seeking traces into Kaufman's career, the foremost clue comes from what he calls "the sense of discovery" (1996a, 133) that drove him. He discovered that political science was fun when it drove his insatiable curiosity and the quest for answering the big questions of public administration. He had an instinct for coupling that quest with a sense of where the good data might lie. That data, in turn, often rested with those who did the government's work in ways he so much admired.

But even if "chance plays a large part in everyone's life," including his own, as he wrote (1996a, 138), there remains the underlying question of what holds the work together. As he looked back on his career, he found himself "astounded to see that it had a logical consistency I was not aware of as I lived through it" (1996a, 138). That logical consistency, of course, could only be explained by his instincts, research skills, and writing talents that spun big questions into convincing answers.

He played a thought experiment with himself: If he had to do it all over again, would the result be any different? After all, he hopes he has managed to learn something through his life. "But who knows?" he wrote in answering his own question. "Maybe I would end up traveling the same road in the same way—and being as surprised the second time as I was the first" (1996a, 138).

That playfulness is the mark of someone who genuinely has had fun with the career he has chosen—or, perhaps more accurately, with the ride he has taken through the great puzzles connecting political science and public administration. The discipline is surely far richer for the chance to ride along with him, as are future generations of students with the opportunity to share the same sense of discovery.

THE FOREST RANGER AND THE CASE STUDY: ASPIRATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENT

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Among those who have devoted their careers to the study of public administration, there is a general agreement that Herbert Kaufman's *The forest ranger* (1960) deserves the appellation of a "classic" in our field.

The forest ranger (hereafter *TFR*) is, among other things, regarded as an exemplar for sound qualitative work in a field

where, as Larry Luton (2007) points out, "the case study is one of the most often used research approaches." But its status as a classic in our field also involves its role as a precursor to major research programs that emerged from the field public administration years later. "Although the term 'street-level bureaucrat' was not in common currency" argues R.A.W. Rhodes, Kaufman "pioneered the topic" two decades before Michael Lipsky laid the foundation for the study of face-to-face contact with clients of state services (Rhodes 2015, 172).

In his "Foreword" to the 2006 reprint edition of *TFR*, Richard Nathan highlighted the connection of the work to the establishment of implementation studies, taking note that Aaron Wildavsky was a student of Kaufman during his years at Yale (Nathan 2006, xvii). The work's influence is such that it received special attention in James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy*, a classic in its own right, as "perhaps the best-known of a government agency trying to manage the behavior of operative working in remote places" (Wilson 1989, 166; cited by Nathan 2006, xvii). On a more normative note, Philip K. Howard credits *TFR* with having provided us with a "guided discretion" model of governance where public "officials are judged not by their mindless compliance or other objective metrics but by a broader view of their effectiveness" (Howard 2015, xiii).

But more than any other legacy, Kaufman's decision to apply a case study approach in his examination of the US Forest Service has emerged over the years as the major rationale for its status as a classic contribution to the study of government. It was as if he had decided to rely on a "conservative and underconceptualized" approach to the study of administrative behavior despite the methodological pressures being generated by the behavioral and positivist movements in the field (see Lynn 2016, 118–119). "Ultimately," contends Jason Burton in a 2012 review, "it may be that *The Forest Ranger* is, first and foremost, of value as an example of how to conduct a case study" (Burton 2012, 625).

The image of *TFR* as a brilliantly crafted case study, however, may obscure what Kaufman intended in his use of the case study method when he first adopted the approach in the late 1940s. In what follows, we offer a brief narrative focused on the story behind the study that highlights the circumstances and methodological choices he made while conducting his fieldwork on the forest service for both his 1950 dissertation and the eventual publication of the book in 1960. In addition, we explore his emerging views on the role case studies can and should play in advancing the science of public administration, if only the potential value of the case method was taken seriously by the field's leaders. Our objective is not merely to honor the status of *TFR* for what it represents to the field, but to offer an appreciation of what Kaufman hoped the study might accomplish.

The Making of a Masterpiece

After returning to civilian life after three years in the Army, Kaufman completed his Master of Arts degree at Columbia in 1946,¹ and the next year was awarded research funding

¹His masters thesis, focused on the hotly debated Federal Administrative Procedure Act, was published in the Boston University Law Review (Kaufman 1946) and was accompanied by an editorial note acknowledging that while some readers might disagree with the author's "speculations" regarding the Act's impact and his "personal opinions as to the desirability of such legislation," the article warranted publication given the "great value" of its "factual analysis and collection of materials."

from the IPA in New York City, which (along with the GI Bill) allowed him to take doctoral courses at Columbia University. At the time, the Institute was engaged in a study of forestry, whereas Kaufman was not interested in forest policy as a substantive matter, he recognized that he could study administrative decision making in the forestry service in a way that could complement the Institute's work (Kaufman 1996a). This decision was the genesis of his dissertation (completed in 1950), which would eventually become his seminal book.² As he would note years later, from the outset, his primary focus was "on organizational problems and relationships illuminated by Forest Service experience rather than on the agency per se; the Forest Service is essentially a 'specimen' for examination" (Kaufman 1967, xiii).³

In that sense, the decision to study the Forest Service was less significant than his decision to apply a case study approach to his subject. In an appendix to the dissertation, Kaufman ruminated about the value and significance of case studies in public administration research. The case method, he wrote, "clearly makes possible the discovery and analysis of factors that must inevitably go unnoticed in broader surveys. It ... brings these forces to light, supplementing the knowledge we get from the extensive investigation. But there is still a long way to go in public administration before all the benefits of the case method become fully apparent. First, there must be many more case studies; by itself, the individual case is suggestive but never conclusive. Secondly, the techniques of administrative analysis required for this approach must be refined" (Kaufman 1950, 243).

While the 1950 study (as well as *TFR* a decade later) involved the use of a wide range of what Kaufman later termed "the standard techniques of the political scientist" (Kaufman 1960, 6–7), the earlier work relied much more on available reports, data, and documents generated by IPA's research team than on Kaufman's "fieldwork" at the District Ranger level. As part of the Institute's research team, he did have considerable access to staff reports that "shed a good deal of light on the practices of the Forest Service as they affected operations" at the field level, but he was given the opportunity to conduct more intensive research in only one of the 753 District offices.

For Kaufman, the fieldwork and the "intensive interview" was central to conducting a credible case study focused on administrative behavior. "The case study may prove barren unless it pursues all ... factors by examining intensively the people and groups involved. The intensive interview is, for this purpose, an indispensable tool" (Kaufman 1950, 251).⁴ When undertaking his research for *TFR* over the next decade,⁵

Kaufman's fieldwork had expanded to five Ranger Districts, and he explicitly adopted the ethnographic research approach of cultural anthropologists as his guiding model. "Within the limits of time and resources available, and recognizing the dangers of confusing superficially similar research activities with identity of method, the researcher adopted a pattern of data gathering that followed, albeit distantly, the anthropological pattern" (Kaufman 1960, 7).

Kaufman's comments on his method does beg the question of whether he was engaged in an ethnographic study rather than a case study, and if so, what does the "difference" imply about *TFR*'s status as a model to be emulated? "Given the intellectual climate of the times," writes Roderick Rhodes, "it would be hard for Kaufman to claim he was a practicing ethnographer...." And yet "ethnography is immersive fieldwork and that is what he did. After all, he stayed in the home of some rangers. That's immersive."⁶ Nor was Kaufman's admiration for the work of cultural anthropology restricted to his study of the Forest Service; two decades later, he would note that the methods he applied in his study of Federal Bureau Chiefs (Kaufman 1981a) was "akin to the techniques of cultural anthropologists, who have long been aware that holistic observation, despite its shortcomings, yields insights and information other approaches cannot produce" (12).⁷

Aspirations for the Case Study Approach

The story behind the writing of *TFR* would be incomplete if it did not include Kaufman's aspirations for the case study approach. In all his recounting and acknowledgements regarding *TFR*, he notes the strong influence of Herbert Simon's *Administrative Behavior* (1947):

Right after the war I became a behavioralist, and I've been one all my life ... I've been devoted to behavioralism following Herb Simon. So I think I've been trying to put a behavioralist spin on administrative behavior.... It didn't do much good...⁸

From the outset Kaufman was on a mission to contribute to the administrative science movement that emerged from Simon's work (see Kaufman 1996a). For many in the field who regard Simon's "science" perspective as anathema to the kind of qualitative work reflected in the widespread use of case studies, the connection of *TFR* to Simon's behavioralism seems disconcerting. Nevertheless, he sought (and received) Simon's advice throughout his IPA research and Simon's influence is evident in many of Kaufman's later writings.⁹

Kaufman's aspirations for the role of case studies in the emerging administrative science is evident in his dissertation. Kaufman maintained that, over time, more case studies would be conducted in the field, and this would lead to additional, improved case studies. In terms of refining the techniques of analysis, Kaufman observed that progress would not be made

²The title of his dissertation was "Field Man in Administration: How the Administrative Behavior of a District Ranger is Influenced Within and by the United States Forest Service." It can be accessed at <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/field-man-administration-how-administrative/docview/301813897/se-2>.

³The IPA's forestry project generated many studies and reports, which provided the basis for Luther Gulick's (1951) publication, "American Forest Policy." Among the book's reviewers, John Gaus (1952) and Charles Hardin (1952) praised the insights and analysis, and both took special note of work's attention to the implementation of forest policy in a highly fragmented federal system—with particular attention to the role played by administrative professionals. Although not explicitly acknowledged, Kaufman's fieldwork obviously had an impact.

⁴Kaufman follows this statement with 10 pages of rules he tried to adhere while conducting such interviews. The result is nothing less than an essential guide to interviewing. See Kaufman (1950, 251–261).

⁵As indicated by other essays in the collection, although at least a decade separated his work on the dissertation and publication of *TFR*, Kaufman was quite busy on other projects—several of them regarded as classics in their own right.

⁶Roderick Rhodes, Personal communication, June 21, 2022.

⁷Kaufman's (1981a) study of administrative chiefs is regarded by Rhodes and Corbett as a "pioneering example" of naturalistic ethnography in the study of the executive. See Rhodes and Corbett (2020, 116).

⁸Herbert Kaufman, Personal (telephone) communication, March 12, 2022.

⁹A cursory exploration of Simon's archives at Carnegie Mellon demonstrates that the respect was mutual. Over the years, when he received an invitation to provide a contribution to a journal or to deliver a keynote address that he would not be able to accept, Simon would often suggest Kaufman as an alternative. See Simon (1940–2001).

unless “the researchers making the surveys take pains to describe the method by which they arrive at their results. There is a tendency in the social sciences to pretest data without explaining how they are gathered. Actually, any case study is as much a test of the method as of the presentation, and it would probably be of great value to subsequent researchers if each report contained a note on method” (Kaufman 1950, 243–244).

Although *TFR* does not include an extended discussion of the case study method per se, in its final pages, Kaufman addresses how he hopes “the mode of description” used in the research will contribute to the “study of administration.” There he highlights how his inquiries focused on administrative relationships “brings to light a few factors in administration not previously known...” and helps “merge in analysis” material drawn from textbooks with how they operate in real life. Through this approach, the “materials of public administration come together in an organic unity with what have hitherto been discrete bodies of literature” drawn from other disciplines. In addition, he regards the work as useful in the comparative study of administration where the focus is on problem of administrative fragmentation generated by “centrifugal forces” found in all cultures (Kaufman 1960, 239–240).

As to the future of the case study approach (as he applied it), he sees the “next step” as the assemblage of related studies that can offer a “catalogue of centrifugal tendencies and of modes of integration in an effort to determine under what conditions each of them occurs, and when each of the latter is successful.... Ultimately, such studies, in conjunction with others, might contribute to the formulation of a general theory of organization, and permit us to progress from administrative description to soundly based administrative prescription” (Kaufman 1960, 240–241).

But to fully grasp Kaufman’s aspirations for the case study approach, we rely on a review essay he published in *PAR* in 1958. Titled “The Next Step in Case Studies,” he begins with a survey of 15 studies added to The Inter-University Case Program (ICP) between 1954 and 1957. He spends the first six pages of the essay assessing the cases as to style and content, praising most of them and stressing that even those lacking in both regards “are more interesting than most textbook treatments of public administration...” (Kaufman 1958, 54). He follows those comments with a section highlighting the positive contributions the ICP has been making to the “enrichment of the study of public administration” (55), but follows this with a sharp critique of the ICP’s inability—or unwillingness—to develop a credible research program centered on the case study approach.

He begins by noting how all 39 cases (24 in the first series and the 15 being reviewed) supported one thesis: “that administration is interaction among groups and individuals...” While more recent cases reconfirm that thesis “many times over,” the ICP has failed to foster case studies that address the wide range of questions being generated by the field. Yes, cases are important as instructional tools, but they can and should play an important part in expanding the knowledge base of public administration. Kaufman pointedly charges the ICP with “dereliction” in this regard. On the many under researched “propositions and questions” being raised in the field, “many of which antedate the case program, the cases shed little light. Instead of helping us validate the former and

answer the latter (which *only* the case method can do!), they enlarge the number of untested declarations and unresolved questions with which our discipline already abounds, And this, I submit, is derelict” (Kaufman 1958, 56; emphasis in original).

Kaufman then turns his attention to how the ICP can “realize its potential” by changing its case selection process to support cases chosen “for purposes of testing-hypotheses,” and to assess submissions to assure that they “conform as closely as we can make them to the classic formulations of the canons of scientific proof.” Within this framework, the legacy of the ICP would “a series of tested propositions” rather than just a collection of interesting studies. “The method would become accretive and probative as it now is not and cannot be. It would be systematic and disciplined where there is now a large element of chance in its choice of material” (Kaufman 1958, 57–58).

Kaufman acknowledges that adoption of his proposed changes would require “a number of acts of faith,” including a “belief in the cumulateness of human knowledge about society, a point of view about the social sciences upon which... history casts many serious doubts” (59). The changes he calls for would also rely on the comparability of cases, the credibility of the ICP case selection process, the criteria applied in selecting on which hypotheses to focus research resources. In a tone that can only be read as resignation, he acknowledges that his faith in such conditions might be misplaced, and if so, “we shall be no worse off than we are now—indeed we shall be better off, for we shall at last be fairly sure that this road leads nowhere, and we shall have at the same time have many cases for class use as we would have had under any circumstances” (59).

“It Didn’t Do Much Good”—Or Has It?

Given Kaufman’s status in the field as well as the major place of *TFR* in the discipline’s canon, it is difficult to imagine him as a committed behavioralist whose major aspirations for the case study method have been dashed. Rather, among the many contributions he is noted for, it is his design and use of the case study method in *TFR* that stands out, and it is often regarded as a foundational counterpoint to the very Simon-inspired administrative science approach he attempted to advance.

To an extent, Kaufman has only himself to blame for this paradoxical situation. His openness to applying both quantitative and quantitative methods adapted from other social science disciplines was clearly established in his dissertation. There he states that there are “aspects of organization that are more susceptible of qualitative than quantitative analysis. In order to broaden the knowledge of organization, new tools must be found to help the researcher get at these intangible, elusive elements” (Kaufman 1950, 262). He then suggests that we look to the qualitative administrative analyses in such disciplines as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and social psychology. “These sciences” he goes on to say, “placing heavy emphasis on individual human beings and their relationships with one another, can make an inestimable contribution to the study of administration” (Kaufman 1950, 262).

Even the most cursory survey of the field’s roots will reflect the fact that public administration has multidisciplinary origins. But in the past few decades, the field seems to have lost sight of its roots, and it is only recently that academics have

been calling for multidisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary approaches, looking to other disciplines to guide their research, from theory to methods (see, e.g., [Blessett 2020](#); [Franklin et al. 2019](#); [Haverland and Yanow 2012](#); [Rodgers and Rodgers 2000](#)). Kaufman's work on *TFR* reminds us that there was a time when the field's relationship to other social science disciplines was strong and effectively put to use to create a true classic.

A number of sound, robust case studies in the tradition of *The Forest Ranger* have followed over the last several decades, which have helped to build theory and knowledge in the field of public administration (see, e.g., [Gormley 1992](#); [Kunioka and Woller 1999](#); [Lambright 2019](#)). Add to this the volumes of work related to street-level bureaucracies, implementation studies, and workplace studies, and you begin to get a sense of the legacy associated with *TFR*.¹⁰ Thus, Kaufman's *The forest ranger* remains a timeless masterpiece and will continue to influence and guide students and scholars on how to conduct strong, rigorous qualitative research in the form of case studies, which continue to be the most popular method for qualitative research in the field ([Ospina, Esteve, and Lee 2018](#)).

KAUFMAN AND ADMINISTRATIVE "RED TAPE"

Leisha De-Hart Davis

Kaufman has also influenced public administration research and theory with his seminal work on *Red tape: Its origins, uses and abuses*. First published in 1977, this slim volume represents the first intellectual consideration of a topic that until then lacked conceptual articulation. To Kaufman, red tape is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of administrative dysfunctions, namely excessive constraints, irrelevant, duplicative, and unnecessary paperwork, inertia, and delayed decisions to name just the few. Red tape arises from noble social goals, such as the desire to protect people from harm (think unsafe food, consumer fraud, environmental hazards), to alleviate the distress of intractable social problems such as poverty and to prevent implosions of the economic and political system. The multiplicity of values embedded in social goals, combined with a staggering array of diverse interests seeking attention, lead to mountains of red tape. While government reformists routinely seek out red tape remedies—such as making government smaller or decentralizing power to the states—Kaufman finds them largely ineffective. Only chipping away at specific forms of red tape over time will give partial relief. As Kaufman argues, we will never be rid of red tape in its entirety because it is the cost of living in a democracy.

Kaufman foretold elements of the original theory of red tape, introduced in a journal article by Barry Bozeman in 1993 and then elaborated upon in his 2000 book *Bureaucracy and red tape*. Kaufman's chapter "The Object of Loathing" maps out the different ways that red tape manifests itself. In just a few

illustrations, Kaufman enumerated the costs of administrative processes in a variety of settings, from giant pharmaceutical firms to small businesses to individual taxpayers; this exercise portended Bozeman's notion of compliance requirements and compliance burden, defined as total resources required and expended to comply with rules. Kaufman argues that red tape is produced partly by the representation of many diverse interests, mirroring Bozeman's negative sum compromise that occurs when rules involve too many stakeholders to achieve rule objectives. Kaufman's contradictory requirements, illustrated by rules governing privacy on one hand and freedom of government information on the other hand, foreshadowed Bozeman's accretion, in which rules accumulate and can become incompatible with one another. Whereas Kaufman argues that individual bureaucrats are red tape scapegoats, Bozeman similarly contends that red tape is a systems problem rather than a people problem. (Sidenote: perceived red tape may indeed be a people problem given research suggesting that centralized decision making and hierarchy are key ingredients of red tape perceptions, [Kaufmann et al. forthcoming](#)). The ideas Kaufman introduced to a wide audience in 1977 provided the foundation for the theoretical concepts that Bozeman introduced to the academy over 15 years later.

Kaufman's argument that red tape is an inherently subjective phenomenon also influenced red tape theory. In *Red tape: its origins, uses and abuses*, he states that "One person's red tape may be another person's treasured procedural safeguard" or "another's sacred protection." This line of thinking preceded the notion of stakeholder red tape, which defines red tape according to the ineffectiveness of rules, regulations, and procedures perceived by different stakeholder groups ([Bozeman 1993](#)). Research in this vein has detected divergent perspectives on red tape between public managers and their contractors ([Feeney and Bozeman 2009](#)), across public employees variably indoctrinated to union values ([Davis 2013](#)), and according to one's hierarchical location in an organization ([Walker and Brewer 2008](#)). The concept of multi-dimensional red tape ([Bozeman 2012](#); [Bozeman and Feeney 2011](#)), refines stakeholder red tape by acknowledging that rules can be ineffective for some stakeholder objectives but not others. Under this schema, diagnosing and remedying red tape becomes even more complex as it evaluates rules based on a variety of stakeholder objectives. This research confirms Kaufman's portrait of red tape as complex and difficult to disentangle, driven by a multiplicity of interests and motivations, and inherently subjective in its appraisal.

Consistent with his portrayal of red tape as inherently subjective, Kaufman also argues that red tape is best measured as *perceived*. While he provides a range of objective data to inform his red tape arguments, citing pages of paperwork and hours of compliance requirements for regulatory tasks, he contends that people interpret the reasonableness of bureaucratic requirements versus the value of their purposes before attacking government on red tape grounds. Building on this realization, subsequent red tape research has relied heavily on perceptual measures of red tape, gathered primarily through organizational surveys. Research based on such surveys has predicted a wide range of behaviors in response to red tape perceptions, including lower creativity ([Feeney and DeHart-Davis 2009](#)), reduced public service motivation ([Moynihan and Pandey 2007](#)), and dampened employee morale ([DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005](#); [George et al. 2021](#); [Steijn and van der Voet 2019](#)). At the organizational level,

¹⁰While no longer pursuing his advocacy of a research program based on the case study method, Kaufman remains defensive when it comes to criticisms of *TFR*. His last published work was a commentary in *PAR*, responding to [Fleischman's \(2017\)](#) charge that Kaufman's classic was flawed because it did not pay sufficient attention to the political context. In his rebuttal, Kaufman wrote that it "is not quite accurate to allege that I completely ignored the political setting of the Forest Service," and he goes on to explain that he had "set a circumscribed goal for my study," which was not "to evaluate the policies of the Forest Service but to describe the way those policy aspirations were translated into concrete actions in the field" ([Kaufman 2017](#), 752).