



CHAPTER THREE

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN MODERN AND POSTMODERN SOCIETY

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The Context of Administrative Ethics

To best examine the ethical dimensions of administration, it is necessary to understand the administrative role as it relates to the social and cultural context in which it functions. This perspective is crucial for both adequately describing ethical situations and developing realistic prescriptions for dealing with them. Designing responses to ethical problems requires adaptation to the characteristics of the situations in which they occur.

The key concepts in a sociocultural perspective on the administrative role are modernization and postmodernization. We are in a time of transition in which the modern heritage of public administration is increasingly in conflict with a postmodern world. The formative concepts and ideas of public administration have their roots in the modernizing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the society public administration functions in is increasingly postmodern.

Modern is a global term for describing the social, cultural, and economic attributes associated with urban industrial society. Berger, Berger, and Kellner (1973) argue that the key phenomena of modernity are bureaucracy and technological production. In fact, they contend that these are the carriers of modern consciousness. As we become involved with bureaucratic organization and the process of technological production, a distinctively modern way of thinking about the world and our place in it begins to emerge.

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Postmodern is a term intended to characterize a world in which the finality and absolutism of once foundational assumptions are being discredited. Assumptions about some kind of objectively real and universal human nature, or natural law, or absolute values and ultimate truths, including those of science, no longer hold sway over the entire society. Fox and Miller (1996) have contrasted modern and postmodern views of the world as follows (p. 45):

- Integration versus disintegration
- Centralization versus decentralization
- Centripetal versus centrifugal
- Totalization versus fragmentation
- Metanarratives versus disparate texts
- Melting pot versus salad
- Commensurable versus incommensurable
- The impulse to unify versus hyperpluralism
- Universalism versus relativism
- Newton versus Heisenberg

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The most obvious example of these differences is the modern idea of society being a melting pot, in which different people and cultures assimilate into one, similar society. In the postmodern world that pot is a salad bowl, in which the various elements maintain their distinct integrity and complement each other. Similarly, although Isaac Newton is considered one of the most influential scientists, the ability of his laws of motion and gravity to predict scientific occurrences was later challenged by scientists like Werner Heisenberg and his uncertainty principle. The significance of the postmodern way of thinking is that the notions of generic, fixed ways of living, structuring public institutions, administering public agencies, and establishing professional ethical norms no longer have an ultimate basis on which to stand.

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Accepting these attributes as dominant in our society can leave us in a state of relativity, reduced to normlessness, and with a conclusion that anything goes, because no one has a basis for a claim to moral rectitude and obligation. Generally consistent with Fox and Miller (1996), the position adopted here is that postmodern society does not leave us without meaning or norms but that we construct our values, beliefs, and ethical norms socially, as we interact with each other over time.

There may not be a universally accepted set of values and norms “lowered down from heaven on a string.” Nevertheless, together we craft for ourselves, through discourse and deliberation, conventions such as values, beliefs, and

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ethical norms to give meaning and order to our lives. Collective decision making in the governance process, including public administration, works best in a postmodern society when it emerges out of an inclusive conversation about how to create order and meaning in our lives together. Hence, democratic governance provides mechanisms and arenas for this social process. Gutmann (1995) calls this deliberative process *eternal vigilance* and argues that deliberation is the democratic self-constraint through which we ward off tyranny and protect the basic liberties of democracy. (See Dennard, 1997, and other articles in the same special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* concerning the implications of postmodern thought for public administration.)

Our collective agreements arrived at through democratic governance may not have any universal or ultimate foundations in the nature of the universe, but they serve as surrogate or ad hoc foundations for us, changing from time to time to fit our changing social agreements. In democratic society, where the connection between one's individual actions and the values of society is constantly evolving, some values persist whereas others go through transformative adaptation to account for changing public sentiment. In this regard, public administrators should attempt to better understand the intersubjectivity among the various shared values, assumptions, and beliefs when carrying out their roles.

Naturally, such a view suggests that our world is socially constructed, built upon layers of meaning we assign to the people, places, and things we encounter. From such a perspective, broad-based agreement provides a level of reliability for making decisions, particularly in a diverse society. Broadly agreed-on norms and values provide foundational reference points and conventions for public administrators involved in the process of safeguarding the public good. Sometimes these are explicit agreements, but more often they consist of shared assumptions that have evolved through social interaction over time. For example, constitutions, governmental institutions, and laws provide a record of our collective social evolution through the formal agreements, documents, and conventions that reflect our shared norms, values, and assumptions.

Agreement on these public aspects of life must be accomplished through broad participation in the governance debate if the institutions created are to have legitimacy through intersubjective reliability. Simply imposing authority does not work in this kind of world. Areas of our lives not lived interdependently, often called *private*, are left in which various subgroups can fashion diverse perspectives and ways of life.

Problems with Modernity in a Postmodern World

Remnants of modernity still exist in today's postmodern world, and the clash between these two worldviews can create conflict. The modern worldview is characterized by the following traits relevant to administrative ethics.

The Attempt to Apply Scientific Principles to Much of Life

The thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was heavily influenced by a belief that science could be introduced into more and more areas of human life (Nelson, 1982). This led quite naturally to an emphasis on instrumental rationality. It was thought that science could provide better methods for everything, from conducting our personal affairs to managing a family to running a factory to providing public goods and services. The tendency was to look to science for one best way of doing things that was consistent with generic scientific principles. Thus we began to think about the need to order and standardize society as well as our own lives.

Under the sway of this scientific approach to life, efficiency of interaction and production becomes a concern, along with predictability of the behavior of others. In modern society, tradition no longer provides stability, order, and consistency of conduct; these things have to be thought about and worked out through organizations, rules, laws, and public policies based on scientific principles. Science provides the unifying foundational assumptions for modern society, to replace those of tradition rooted in history, custom, and religion, which have become relativized.

However, to the extent that postmodern thought has begun to displace modernity, foundational assumptions, including those based on science, lose their power to define ultimate reality. Science is increasingly seen as another social construct that shapes our perceptions of the world but with no greater authority than other such perspectives. The use of scientific principles as the sole basis for designing and administering public organizations is discredited (Jun and Rivera, 1997).

Multiplicity and Differentiation of Roles

Social relationships and personal identity become more complex in modern society. People no longer identify themselves with one role or even a few. Our lives become an intricate network of interrelated roles, and we move through these roles without thinking very explicitly about the changes in behavior they require. During the course of one day, we may assume a broad array

of roles—parent, spouse, neighbor, administrator, church member, investor, citizen, rowing partner—each with its own behavioral pattern and set of obligations. Robert Jay Lifton (1993) has described the way we move among roles, using the idea of the *protean self*. Proteus was a god in Greek mythology who had the power to change his shape at will—to *morph* himself from a human appearance to that of a bird or a snake or a lion or running water or anything else imaginable. In this way he could elude anyone seeking to capture him. The protean metaphor was also used in early American vaudeville theater, which involved traveling variety shows. The *protean act* was one of the standard favorites in the vaudevillian repertoire, put on by quick-change artists. Protean actors would move rapidly on and off stage, costumed very differently from moment to moment. A knight in armor would suddenly be transformed into a Victorian lady, followed by a cowboy, and then a biblical figure, and on and on, to the amazement and delight of the audience. The distinguished sociologist Erving Goffman (1973) similarly employed a dramaturgical approach to understanding the ways individuals in modern society present themselves as different actors as they move from one setting and role to the next. Certainly, in the postmodern world with its complexity and multiple roles, we can all be viewed as protean at any given time.

Salman Rushdie (1997) has described the extremity of this phenomenon as follows:

In the modern age, we have come to understand our own selves as composites, often contradictory, even internally incompatible. We have understood that each of us is many different people. Our younger selves differ from our older selves; we can be bold in the company of our lovers and timorous before our employers, principled when we instruct our children and corrupt when offered some secret temptation; we are serious and frivolous, loud and quiet, aggressive and easily abashed. The 19th century concept of the integrated self has been replaced by this jostling crowd of “I”s. And yet, unless we are damaged, or deranged, we usually have a relatively clear sense of who we are. I agree with my many selves to call all of them “me” [p. 36].

In this Rushdian world, the modern idea of a unitary, integrated self begins to transmute into the notion that one sequentially takes on the various roles that collectively one identifies as oneself. Postmodern views intensify this problem of roles, for without any definitive foundational assumptions about human existence and the world around us, we have no authoritative place to turn for determining which roles ought to have priority. We are left in a state of constant perplexity about how to allocate our attention, time, and effort among the array

of competing roles. How do I weigh my family obligations against those of the organization in which I am employed? Which comes first: my professional obligations or those of my organization? What happens when my religious views come into conflict with duties assigned at work? How do I sort out the priority of the obligations associated with being a citizen in a democratic society and those associated with being a public administrator?

From Separation to Co-Mingling Work and Private Life

In modern society, work no longer blends easily into our private lives as was true of traditional society. It is separated in time and space from home, family, and neighborhood. In traditional society the farmer or herdsman lived at his place of work and made no precise temporal distinctions between work and nonwork. The same was typical for physicians, artists, lawyers, shopkeepers, and craftspeople. However, in modern society, work is done in a particular place and during defined hours. Deviations from this norm are viewed as intrusions of work into our private life, or vice versa. This spatial and chronological separation has been conducive to the development of an ethical identity for the employment role that may be quite different from the ethical identities associated with other roles. Although that may threaten one's integrity as a whole person, it may also make it easier to uphold a public ethic without undue influence by the norms of more personal and private roles.

The strict separation of work and private realms begins to blur again in postmodern society. As organizations decentralize and move away from uniform work regimens, as dealing with information becomes more and more the means of conducting work, and as technology enhances communication, increasing numbers of people work at least part of the time at home or another place other than a central office. Being in a specific place to do one's work becomes less and less important. Computers, scanners, fax machines, pagers, cellular phones, and smart phones make space less relevant than time. Some employees work out of cars, airplanes, hotels, temporary offices, and homes, and go to the place of the organization only infrequently. The 2009 George Clooney movie *Up in the Air* depicts an extreme form of this rootless style of work.

These changes may tend to make ethical identities associated with employment roles less distinct and also susceptible to influence by other roles. Obligations for public ethical norms such as the public interest may be influenced by the interests of private roles. Or the loss of the geographical continuity and regular sustained relationships often found in the workplace may seriously attenuate the sense of connectedness through which ethical standards are reinforced and maintained.

Schultz (2004) has noted this blurring of boundaries in the postmodern world and its effects on professional ethics. He argues that “in a postmodern society marked by a blurring of the line between public and private as well as by the greater integration of the three economic sectors, the ethical rules that apply to different facets of life and work are being challenged, necessitating a rethinking of moral boundaries and the rules governing professional behavior” (p. 281). He suggests that we may need to reconceptualize ethics to accommodate the move away from the “ethical compartmentalization” of the modern world.

Relativism

Neither roles nor values are viewed as absolute in modern society. Roles are acquired and given up, and they vary in importance from time to time. Consequently they are often maintained with considerable role distance. That is to say, they are not allowed to comprehend our identity. Roles are relative to particular times and places; they are not inherent in our most essential selves.

Similarly, values within society exhibit enormous diversity. Some people believe one thing and some another. We are not shocked to discover this fact in modern society; instead we tend to acknowledge and emphasize the relativity of values.

Postmodernism furthers the erosion of foundational assumptions as the universal and ultimate status of the core beliefs of modernism, rooted in science, is also called into question. The relativity of values threatens to undermine any belief in obligation and duty. Thus the intentional social construction of public ethical norms becomes even more crucial. In the absence of universally accepted moral absolutes, working out agreements through discourse, both in person and electronically, concerning the norms of our interdependent public life is essential for establishing a basis for social stability. In other words, although we may be able to agree on fundamental democratic values, we intersect in our collective or public lives and we may need to deliberate and socially construct a set of norms to accommodate this intersection.

Pluralization of Society

The significant dynamic behind all four of these characteristics is the pluralization of modern society. As people from diverse cultures have moved with great rapidity into urban commercial and industrial centers during the past two hundred years, they have found it necessary to confront one another's differences. The homogeneity of traditional society, with its unifying and stabilizing cultural bonds, has been broken. Very little can be assumed or taken for granted. New

forms of organization have developed, and new ways of coping with a broad spectrum of lifestyles, diets, preferences, political philosophies, religious views, and modes of exchange have evolved. This “pluralization of life worlds” has led to the segmentation of individual lives as people have attempted to relate themselves to “severely discrepant worlds of meaning and experience” (Berger, Berger, and Kellner, 1973, p. 64).

The early stages of this pluralizing process are vividly illustrated in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. In a little Russian village named Anatevka, an orthodox Jewish community lives out a predictable and stable existence through its highly integrated web of tradition, which encompasses daily routines as well as major events such as birth, marriage, and death. The leading figure, Teyve, constantly reminds himself and the audience that tradition is how he knows who he is and what God expects of him. “Without our tradition,” he says, “we are as shaky as a fiddler on the roof” (Stein, 1971, p. 64).

And, indeed, in the course of the play, we see the integrity and absoluteness of Anatevka’s traditions challenged by the arrival of the czar’s troops. Familiar traditions governing courtship, marriage, and family roles are confronted with different traditions from an alien society and robbed of their power. Although in this case it is a matter of modern society invading a traditional community rather than the migration of rural villagers to an urban area, the process of pluralization is essentially the same.

In 1927, in *The Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey described how this emerging heterogeneity gave rise to a multiplicity of “publics.” From Dewey’s perspective, there is no such thing as a unitary public in modern society. As people pursue their various self-interests through social interaction, there are certain unintended, indirect consequences, which may be viewed positively or negatively. Entrepreneurs who establish steel mills to make a profit indirectly create air pollution. However, they may also, without planning to do so, create a market for smaller businesses in the surrounding area. Publics either diminish or enhance these indirect consequences by calling for the appointment of public officials and the passage of laws.

Thus governmental organizations have served an increasingly pluralized public during the past hundred years. These publics, according to Dewey’s thesis, are generated by the heterogeneous composition of modern industrial society. As we attempt to realize our own interests, we invariably find ourselves linked interdependently with others who are different and have different interests. We are sometimes inhibited in achieving our goals by the activities of others and sometimes helped, but whatever the case, we begin to realize that our fate is bound up with the decisions and behaviors of other people whose values differ, in ways both large and small, from our own.

Postmodern conditions unleash the increasingly assertive expression of this sociocultural diversity. One result is that government based on bureaucratic rationality, attempting to offer standardized services and goods, increasingly alienates this diverse citizenry. Operating with modern assumptions advanced by the American Progressive movement of the early twentieth century, government finds itself in interminable conflict with the people it seeks to serve. The Progressives believed that government should treat everyone the same in order to be fair, a reasonable assumption given the power of political machines in that era. However, now sometimes government is expected to treat everyone equally (voting rights, access to employment, judicial processes) and at other times to treat them differently (handicapped access, Head Start, affirmative action). Standardized policies and programs are increasingly at odds with diverse and vocal publics.

Implications for Public Administration

It appears that modernization has had three major implications for public administration.

The Political Nature of Public Administration

An initial impact of modernization on public administration was the attempt to separate politics from administration in order to develop a science of administration, a science that was expected to lead to a more efficient delivery of public goods and services, one uninfluenced by the diversions of political influence. To the progressive reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this seemed to offer an advance beyond the highly politicized public administration that had existed under the urban political machines of the nineteenth century and in traditional societies for most of human history. However, the paradox was that although modern thinking emphasized the application of scientific rationality to government, other characteristics of modern society made this no more possible in twentieth-century America than it had been in the traditional societies of the past. The diversification of society produced a more turbulent environment for administrators, one that further impeded the removal of public administration from the strife of politics.

In postmodern society it has become increasingly clear that attempting to define the administrative role as separated from politics simply isolates administrators from a highly differentiated populace and discourages administrators

from facing the substantive political role they do play. The separation of politics from administration may have existed in the minds of Max Weber (1946), Woodrow Wilson (1887), Leonard White (1926), Frank Goodnow (1900), and a generation of other scholars, but almost nowhere else. The notion that politicians make policy decisions through a process involving substantive rationality and that administrators simply apply their best scientific instrumental reasoning toward implementation has been sufficiently attacked to require no extensive treatment here (Gaus, 1936; Waldo, 1948). Postmodernization creates pressures and dynamics that compel administrators to be involved in decisions about goals and policies and to compete with others for power and resources (Benveniste, 1977; Cooper, 1994; Wamsley and Zald, 1973).

The multiplication and differentiation of roles are the critical phenomena in the politics of the public administrative role. Each role is constituted by a set of obligations—well or poorly defined—that administrators must carry out to maintain the role, and a set of interests—income, social status, and job satisfaction—that they derive from the role. We must bear the obligations if we are to secure the interests. Some of these roles belong exclusively to the private life of home, family, and community; some have to do with the world of work; and some overlap the two realms. Together they represent the complex multifaceted identity of a modern administrator (Downie, 1971; Means, 1970). From time to time these roles come into conflict with each other; the interests and obligations associated with them compete for our time, attention, and energy. We must manage this conflict effectively to prevent conflicts of interest that could detract from our objective judgment as administrators or that at least could be perceived that way by the citizenry.

The conflict between these roles arises from the tension created by antithetical attractions: personal economic interests and the obligation to protect the public interest. The politics of the administrative role is rooted in this kind of tension (Crozier, 1973; Tullock, 1965; Wamsley and Zald, 1973). Because the various values in postmodern society are not universally accepted, there are no absolutes to define precisely what ought to be done when roles conflict. Values are ordered and priorities established among roles through negotiation with ourselves and others in each situation, generally along the lines described in Chapter Two. It is in trading off our own varied interests for the interests of the organization we work for, and vice versa, that the political dynamics of the administrative role emerge.

Sheldon Wolin (1960) has provided the basis for a further explanation of organizational politics. His focus is the evolution of communities through the modernizing process. Wolin argues that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the “organic,” integrated, tradition-based communities of the preindustrial and preurban era began to crumble in the face of migration to urban and

industrial areas. People began to look for stability, identity, belonging, security, purpose, and power in organizations of all kinds: religious, industrial, labor, reform, political, scientific, commercial, and governmental.

In this process the “natural” networks of relationships of the older organic communities were broken up, and transformed by the rationality and intentionality of organizations into instruments for achieving particular goals. They were designed to refine steel, manufacture automobiles, provide water, reform government, operate transit facilities, and enforce building and safety regulations. However, contrary to Weber’s ideal type, people refuse to participate in these organizations in a partial fashion. They tend to want to participate in organizations as wholes; they try to spill over the boundaries of roles in a drive to create substitutes for “natural communities.” These substitute communities, described by Selznick (1966), subvert the goals of organizations and divert their resources toward satisfying the personal needs of their members.

This intermingling of two sets of conflicting goals creates the motivation to engage in political activity both within and beyond the organization. Members of an organization bring with them the often unarticulated goal of self-fulfillment through social relationships and interaction, but the organization is established to achieve certain specific goals for a public or for the owners of the organization. Negotiating the tension between these goals requires continual political transactions within an organization and among external forces.

Furthermore, the opportunity to engage in political behavior is heightened by the latitude of discretion granted to public administrators (Nachmias and Rosenbloom, 1980; Rohr, 1989). The growing complexity and technical nature of problems addressed by government have created a tendency in legislators to delegate enormous powers to administrators, who are presumed to have specialized knowledge of particular policy areas. Thus the implementation of legislation becomes, in fact, an exercise in substantive policymaking. Broad legislative “shells,” debated publicly and approved by elected officials, are then filled with a multitude of administrative decisions that are far less visible and far more difficult to monitor. These bureaucratic rules and regulations become the real substance of public policies. These circumstances are highly conducive to political transactions (Benveniste, 1977; Davis, 1969; Lieberman, 1973; Lowi, 1979).

Consequently it is not surprising to discover that studies of role overlap between politicians and administrators in Western democracies reveal it to be substantial. Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) examined the extent to which administrative and political officials engage in similar activities. They found substantial convergence of the two role types, with administrators significantly involved in policymaking and politicians engaging in administrative matters. The greatest overlap was found in the United States.

If the administrative role in postmodern society is inevitably political and heavily discretionary in nature, significant ethical considerations must be acknowledged. For example, using the two broad categories of internal and external political transactions, we can identify three types of ethical concerns associated with each: corruption, loss of efficiency, and abuse of power. If we look at some typical external political transactions, we find these ethical concerns manifested in the following ways:

- *Agency–political party.* In transactions between a public agency and a political party the ethical concern is usually the potential corruption of the agency's legally mandated mission. The party may use its influence with agency employees to circumvent established procedure for the benefit of the party or certain of its members. This corrupts the public interest that all public servants are obligated to uphold.
- *Agency–agency.* When two public agencies become involved in political transactions, the concern is for loss of efficiency. This kind of situation typically involves competition for resources and jurisdiction—that is, a struggle for power. The time and effort expended amount to a waste of the citizens' money as well as a breach of their good faith. Poor stewardship of public resources is ultimately the equivalent of stealing from those who have entrusted the agency with their property.
- *Agency–constitutional branch of government.* Political interaction between an agency and members of the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of government produces a concern for abuse of power and for corruption. Abuse of power may occur when members of these branches attempt to use an administrative agency for their own advantage. For example, a president who tries to use the powers of the Internal Revenue Service or the Federal Bureau of Investigation against political opponents is going beyond the appropriate use of his executive power. Conversely, if an agency becomes involved in using its resources in unusual ways to influence public officials, that may also be a matter of corruption. When, for example, a planning department cooperates in bribing members of a city council to gain favors for a developer, that agency's maintenance of the public trust has become corrupted.
- *Agency–interest groups.* Corruption is also the concern when interest groups become involved in efforts to influence a public agency. When labor unions, chambers of commerce, community improvement associations, professional associations, industrial associations, taxpayers' organizations, and lobbies of various kinds move beyond persuasion and begin to offer favors, corruption is imminent. The agency may find itself on the take. Its charge to serve the public interest is then corrupted by the rewards of special interests.

When we turn to the internal politics of public organizations, the primary concern is with loss of efficiency. When individual members or subunits of an agency begin to compete for resources and jurisdiction or build coalitions with others, the resources provided by the citizenry to accomplish a legally established mission are siphoned off. The political gamesmanship of the members of the organization diverts time, money, and effort away from the provision of public goods and services. The taxpayers are deprived of some portion of what government rightfully owes them.

The politics of public administration, then, raises some potentially serious concerns for the ethical performance of administrators. As we all know, politics is unavoidable. Given the dynamics of modern society and the intermingling of personal and organizational goals that results from these dynamics, the notion of clearly separating politics from administration is not valid. However, it is possible to identify a spectrum of administrative politics ranging from minimal to pervasive. It also is possible to conceive of approaches to reducing, or minimizing, the clearly unethical manifestations of political conduct. (These are discussed further in Chapters Six and Seven.) The significant question is not how to remove politics entirely from administration, but how and under what circumstances to constrain it. Accomplishing this task or, more accurately, engaging it regularly requires that managers think not in terms of discrete decisions but about ways to design processes and structures. Policies, procedures, organizational arrangements, training, and sanctions (both positive and negative) must be crafted to encourage ethical conduct and reinforce its importance.

Separation of the Public Administrative and Citizen Roles

The second impact of modern society on public administration is that there is a tendency to separate the role of public administrator from the role of citizen. All who work for a government bear a dual obligation: they are responsible for serving the public and they are members of the public they are supposed to serve. Elsewhere I have argued that this dichotomy, the separation of the public and private roles of the public administrator, is best viewed on a public-private continuum (Cooper, 1991). As one moves more toward the public end of the continuum, civic virtue and the common good become even more critical, as does the need for the responsible administrator to embrace the role of citizen-administrator.

These dual roles sometimes create conflicting obligations. The role of employee of a specific organization, although theoretically only an expression of a larger public servanthood, is far more powerful and concrete in its sanctions and incentives than that larger role. The role of public servant quite easily becomes

limited to, and defined by, the particular organization. When this occurs, loyalty to the organization may become confused with duty to uphold the public interest. This in turn often gets translated into an assumption that carrying out the orders of superiors is tantamount to fulfilling one's duty as a public servant.

Weber's (1946) emphasis on functional rationality for administrators, a reflection of modernization, encourages the bifurcation of these two critical roles. We think substantively about the goals and ends of government only in the private sphere of citizenship. In the role of public administrator, however, we are encouraged to think only of the best means to accomplish the goals predetermined by superiors or elected officials. The dichotomization of citizen and administrative roles is seldom complete; however, the pressure to move in this direction is strong in modern society, and the outcome amounts to an unknown number of public administrators who have given up some measure of their citizenship at the workplace.

Only by devising ways of encouraging public administrators to maintain a linkage between these two roles can we sustain a broader view of the role of public servant than simply loyalty to a governmental organization. The tension provided by the citizenship role stretches the boundaries of the administrative role to include the hierarchy of law and the democratic tradition. This redefines the public administrative role in a way that is appropriate for an increasingly demanding citizenry in postmodern society. It positions the administrator to engage citizens in the process of socially constructing a political order rather than seeking to impose authoritatively expert solutions. (In my earlier work, I have argued that the public administrator should act as a fiduciary administrator. For a more complete discussion of the fiduciary administrator, see Cooper, 1991, particularly Chapter Five.)

The ethical significance of these dual role characteristics should be clear. One of the reasons civil service positions are generally available only to citizens is the assumption that they will carry into public organizations a primary loyalty to the people. This loyalty, which should precede loyalties to any particular agency or government official, will enhance the trustworthiness of their service (Stahl, 1976). Because public service is a fiduciary role, anyone who accepts such employment is ultimately bound by an obligation to the public of that jurisdiction. This bond of trust is maintained only if one acts within a public organization as a citizen with certain added responsibilities—as a citizen, first, and as one citizen among others who agrees to do work on behalf of all, second. Paul Appleby (1965) has characterized the occupants of this dual role as “the especially responsible citizens who are officials” (p. 335).

This is particularly critical for those who assume administrative roles, for they take on themselves even greater fiduciary responsibilities. They agree not

only to perform work on behalf of the people of a governmental jurisdiction but also to assist in structuring, coordinating, supporting, supervising, and evaluating the work of others who have chosen to serve the collective weal. In the words of Michael Walzer (1970), "They are citizens in lieu of the rest of us; the common good is, so to speak, their specialty" (p. 216). They bear responsibility not only for their own use of public resources but also for achieving the most efficient and effective expenditure of those resources by others.

This compound fiduciary responsibility of public administrators suggests that whenever an employing organization is found to be carrying out its mission in a fashion not in the best interests of the citizenry, all public administrators, and indeed all public employees, should feel duty bound to take action on behalf of their fellow citizens. The failure to do so represents a breach of trust and a denial of the responsibilities of citizenship. This is an ethical concern of the most fundamental sort.

The responsibility associated with the role of the citizen is admittedly problematic. For most of us, there is no formal statement of what that responsibility entails, as only naturalized citizens are required to take an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution. However, it seems reasonable to argue that what is required for those seeking citizenship is implied for those who are citizens by birth.

Another kind of problem is raised by Walzer (1970), who suggested in the mid-twentieth century that some people seriously question the moral priority of citizenship because of the alienation and powerlessness that many feel. He argued that "they experience a kind of moral uncasiness; their citizenship is a source of anxiety as well as of security and pride" (p. 204).

Nevertheless, Walzer and other citizenship theorists have asserted the importance of the concept and the functions it suggests. Dennis Thompson (1970) argues that normative citizenship theory functions as an ideal and pictures a desirable state of affairs that is not yet realized. We might argue that rehabilitation and enhancement of the meaning of citizenship are of crucial importance in the modern democratic administrative state. If democratic citizenship continues to wane in meaning and diminish in reality, democratic administration would seem to be impossible. The responsibility of the public administrator must be grounded in an understanding of the responsibility of the citizen.

As well, in today's transnational world the meaning and significance of national citizenship may be less meaningful and useful than it once was as a distinction through which we categorize our public obligations (Cooper and Yoder, 1999). As the boundaries of the nation-state are increasingly blurred and the nations around the world become increasingly interdependent, the task of redefining citizenship and even of considering *denizenship* may be necessary.

Although not all the citizenship literature projects the same ideal, two threads seem to run through those theories that are democratic in orientation. One of these is, of course, participation of some kind in the making of political decisions. The other, which is more directly relevant here, is an obligation to consider the opinions and wishes of other members of the citizenry along with one's own. In Pranger's words (1968), "Incumbent upon the good member, the virtuous citizen, is the ability to make political decisions which at once protect his own integrity and take cognizance of the integrity of others" (p. 102). Similarly, Walzer (1970) maintains that unless citizens have "a sense of the whole over and above their sense of themselves as particular persons," they will have little interest in participating in politics. He concludes that "it is upon some such sense of the whole that the ideal of citizenship rests" (p. 215).

Does this primary obligation to the citizenship role suggest that public administrators should run to the press, an elected official, or a prosecutor every time something occurs that is not totally consistent with the legislative mandate for their organization? Certainly not! It is important to assess the seriousness of a situation, consider the full range of values at stake, and then act in proportion to these circumstances. There is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by overreacting to a perceived problem. A press conference is hardly warranted the first time the boss asks you to hire a friend who does not rank as highly as other candidates for a position. A talk with the boss to express your disapproval of the request might be more appropriate. George Graham (1974) proposes a series of steps that are generally consistent with this "proportional" approach. His prescriptions are founded on the concept of due process, which requires "all administrators in exercising the power and discretionary authority with which they are entrusted to be informed, to be fair, to be rational, and to be reasonable" (p. 9).

Maintaining a citizenship role while serving as an administrator of the public's business requires a healthy sense of critical perspective about an agency's conduct, but it does not necessitate disproportionate responses to misdeeds that may do more harm to the organization than good. The organization itself is a piece of the public's property. Attention to the double obligations of being a citizen-administrator implies the careful adjustment, repair, or on occasion major overhaul of the public's machinery. Moral imagination is the requisite skill and ethical autonomy is the quality of character necessary for such stewardship.

The normative basis for viewing the administrator in this way is found in our historical tradition of ethical citizenship. This tradition is not simply received as a given from the past but rather is a social construct that we ourselves have consciously created over time through deliberation and the weaving together of several strands of political thought: Anti-Federalism, Jeffersonianism, the Colonial Puritans' democratic ideas, and an understanding of the importance of

voluntary associations. This historical social construct serves the function of a foundational source in the absence of a universal one. (See Cooper, 1991, for an elaboration of this normative argument.)

Managers of Diversity

The third implication of the postmodern era is that public administrators must be managers of diverse interests. In the absence of any unitary value system with absolute authority in postmodern society, both the political and the administrative processes of government become the focus of diverse interests. As citizens attempt to construct socially a set of institutions and policies to serve the functions once provided by received tradition and subsequently by the scientific perspective advanced by modern progressive reformers, administrators find themselves besieged by this assertive citizenry.

The administrative arm of government becomes significantly involved in managing citizens' diverse interests because, even with the complex political representation provided by the federal government, people still do not feel that their preferences, needs, and problems are cared for adequately. They tend to organize in voluntary associations, which assert their own proposals and demands at every point in the policymaking process, from electoral politics to the legislative process to the stage in which laws are implemented. Kenneth Meier (1979) points out that most of these groups have long since learned that administrative agencies are key leverage points because most legislative proposals originate there and the resulting laws are then shaped by these agencies in significant ways during implementation (see also Lowi, 1979).

Interest group theorists such as Bentley (1949), Calhoun (1953), and Truman (1951) have argued that these citizen organizations are essential for democratic representation in the modern state. The formal machinery of government could not possibly be designed to represent the changing spectrum of interests in a pluralistic mass society like the United States with sufficient particularity. It is far more efficient and effective to allow these groups to form themselves and project their own demands into the governmental process (Ornstein and Elder, 1978).

However, Parenti (1970) has identified a serious problem with this theoretical perspective. It assumes that all significant interests can be represented in this fashion. In his case study of efforts to organize a low-income community in New Jersey, Parenti concludes that only those with the necessary economic resources can make themselves heard effectively by government through interest group activity. The impediments that citizens must surmount in order to influence public decision making have been conceptualized as *participation costs* by a number of scholars, including Buchanan and Tullock (1962), Warren and Weschler (1975), and myself (Cooper, 1979).

The greatest leverage for reducing or subsidizing these costs lies with public administrators. Administrators have great potential for influencing policy developments that affect services, and often considerable discretion in the actual delivery of services. Administrative initiative in managing the plural interests of modern society is essential for effective government. Administrators can provide a link between citizens and elected officials that is vital for the national, state, county, and even city governments whose populations have expanded substantially during the past fifty years.

However, the tendency of public administration during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century was to place a high value on standardized services and to respond to the pluralization of society with reluctance (Caro, 1975). From Weber to Wilson to Goodnow to White to Urwick and Gulick (1957), we find a rather consistent development of the notion that the chief task of public administrators is to implement policy efficiently by applying generic scientific principles. This perspective eschewed notions that social and cultural variation might significantly affect administrative principles. A generic approach to administration, combined with an emphasis on efficiency, gave rise to a tendency to standardize public services. Centralization, of course, has been one of the logical concomitants of standardization, particularly during the New Deal, World War II, and the postwar years.

Another factor contributing to the tendency to standardize services is the bureaucratic assumption that equality is the equivalent of equity (Cooper, 1979)—that if everyone is treated the same, then everyone will be treated fairly. This assumption appears to have gained dominance through the American Progressive movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reacting against the special favors, patronage, and nepotism of corrupt machine governments, the Progressives called for equal treatment of all citizens and government employees. “Without fear or favor” was the way public administrators were to perform their duties. Good government was understood as standardized government, which would in turn yield efficient government.

The goal of the rational management of society has implied that uniformity and order are requisites for efficiency. However, in a diverse society with minimal shared assumptions about values and lifestyles, this kind of rationality no longer works for many administrative functions. Hugh Miller (2002) notes that in a postmodern view of the world, the very notion of rationality is more limited than it was in the modern view. Miller asserts that “our attempts to be ever more rational seem to get in our own way. Rules pile up on rules Rules are intended to be neutral, perhaps, but they favor some individual or group in spite of the best intentions Continued attempts to be a more rational society bring about rationality’s own corrosion” (pp. x–xi). What seems to be

required is a new understanding of administrative rationality that is rooted more in notions of diversity, complexity, turbulence, and disorder and also in the idea that rationality is not strictly linear.

We are now realizing that the old approach is unworkable and impractical. A more systemic view of the relationship between public agencies and the citizenry is required. If the administrative agencies of government are to remain effective and viable, they must view themselves as open systems in turbulent environments. The citizenry, the most important component of the environment, must not be ignored or even yielded to reluctantly under the pressure of interest groups. Rather, those who direct and manage these systems must act with initiative to be certain that input from the social environment is being sought and encouraged and that participation costs are reduced or subsidized as much as possible.

This kind of dynamic interaction with the social environment may trade off some measure of production efficiency for a varied array of service types and delivery modes. It may even lead to the devolution of service provision or delivery to lower levels of scale, such as neighborhoods. (See Berry, Portney, and Thompson, 1991, for research on neighborhood governance.) All this may look less orderly and therefore less efficient in the short run but may represent a more effective adaptation to the pluralistic environment of modern society. It may be a matter of giving up a limited kind of efficiency, which suboptimizes the production at the level of single agencies, for the sake of the broader efficiency of the entire democratic governmental system (Bennis, 1966).

The ethical concern related to this third proposition is for social equity. The assumption that equal treatment is fair treatment needs to be reexamined. If in fact members of a population are not the same and are quite varied in their tastes, needs, preferences, and backgrounds, then treating them as though they were the same is not fair.

Inequity has often been institutionalized in the practices of public agencies under the banner of standardization. This is because the standards adopted have tended to be the key attributes of one population group—often those of the majority. Consequently, so-called standardized civil service exams have often assumed the attributes of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males as the norms. Public education has been built around curricular assumptions that favor the offspring of middle-class, English-speaking nuclear families. Housing codes have been standardized around ideal, newly built structures and contain a bias against the varying conditions and needs of older neighborhoods.

Achieving social equity requires a response from public agencies that seeks to approximate the needs, preferences, and demands of the citizenry. Because everyone is not the same in these respects, public administrators need a set

of techniques for generating citizen input into organizational decision making, and the skills to use these techniques and to maintain an accurate assessment of the social environment. This kind of intelligence would make it possible to consider an array of services and means of service delivery congruent with an organization's constituent groups.

This is not simply a pragmatic attempt to achieve greater client satisfaction. Although it is concerned with providing public services in a more satisfying fashion, it is more fundamentally a matter of equitable treatment of all citizens. Furthermore, from one perspective, in a modern industrial society the full realization of citizenship involves the ability to consume public services. According to Warren and Weschler (1975), citizenship in such a society requires more than the legal constitutional rights normally assumed to be the privileges of citizenship. They argue that people are deprived of their full citizenship if services are provided in such a way that they are too costly to consume.

Warren and Weschler (1975) define *consumption costs* as increments of time, effort, and money that must be added by a citizen-consumer to a public good or service to make it consumable. If one has to walk or drive three miles to reach the nearest bus stop, those travel costs must be added to the fare to ascertain the true cost of using that bus service. Thus when services are standardized, the costs of consuming public services will be distributed disproportionately to resources. Justice in the distribution of public services will not be achieved or even approximated.

A parallel ethical concern has to do with the distribution of the participation costs. It has been argued that if public administrators are to develop more accurate assessments of citizens' needs, preferences, and demands, the active pursuit of citizen input is necessary. To achieve that goal, participation costs must be low enough to allow the full population spectrum to participate. Again, this is not only a matter of practical necessity but also an ethical consideration. Citizens should not be deprived of the right to participate in public decision making because it requires a greater expenditure of time, effort, and money than they can afford or than the anticipated benefits seem to warrant.

Public administrators in modern society need to be effective managers of diverse interests. As both Ostrom (1974) and Waldo (1965) have argued, if democratic administration is to take place, public administrators must abandon their almost exclusive preoccupation with the costs of providing and producing public goods and services and begin to balance these costs against the costs that must be borne by citizens. Waldo states the case thus: "It has long seemed to me that our approach to administration is far too much 'producer oriented,' far too little 'consumer oriented.' . . . But if we value not only efficiency and productivity, but also seek to increase human equality and the values of participation, do we

give these the attention they deserve in and relating to the administrative process?" (p. 45).

Political Theory and Administrative Ethics

Since the first edition of this book was published, it has become increasingly clear that an adequate normative theory of the public administrative role, including a normative ethical theory, must be developed within the context of a larger political theory of public administration. Such a theory lies beyond the scope of this book, but it seems appropriate to indicate at this point some of the ethical issues that will need to be dealt with in such a theory.

The diversity of modern society, the tendency to separate the administrative role from the citizenship role, and the demise of the modern notion of separating politics and administration, with its ensuing recognition of the unavoidability of administrative discretion—all these forces pose some serious problems for a definition of the administrative role. It is now clear that public administrators make political judgments that range from the timing of policy proposals to budget strategies to extensive rules and regulations pursuant to laws that legislators intentionally made vague. Public administrators exercise discretion, and they do so politically with both legislators and clientele groups. Administrators seem to be firmly ensconced within the policy “iron triangle” as key participants in the political process of public policy formation and adoption (see Smith, 1988, for examples of this). However, even though we acknowledge this fact and find no dearth of descriptive analyses of the dynamics involved, we have nothing approaching an adequate prescriptive political theory of the administrative role that would define the obligations of the administrator in the politics of the policy process (Fleishman, Liebman, and Moore, 1981).

From this lack of normative clarity, ethical issues emerge around three related aspects of the democratic public policy process: representation, education, and implementation.

Representation

In modern democracies it is assumed that the people maintain political sovereignty but that their interests, demands, and preferences are reflected in the public policies that are adopted. This has been understood as occurring through the process of representation, which until recent years has been assigned entirely to the political role. However, if we have now discovered that administrators also act in politically significant ways in the policy process, then it is unclear whether in so doing they also incur obligations for representation. It seems plausible to argue that in a democratic polity, representation of popular

preferences, demands, and interests must operate in some fashion whenever substantive policy decisions are being made. If this proposition is valid, public administrators bear an obligation to represent the citizenry whenever they are influencing or determining the substantive content of policies (Chandler, 1984).

Should we accept the representative obligations of public administrators, there are only more questions to be answered. We must then ask to what extent and in what ways administrators are so obligated. How must their exercise of discretion be informed by the people? Is some kind of regular and systematic accounting to the public required, analogous to the electoral process, or is accountability maintained through elected officials? In other words, should administrative representation involve a direct relationship with the people or one that is indirect? If it is direct, systematic and regular citizen participation seems an essential function for the administrator. If indirect, then elected officials and administrators bear responsibility for discovering ways of acknowledging and carrying out a shared obligation.

Furthermore, if public administrators are obligated to represent the citizenry in some fashion, the classic debate over *trustee* versus *delegate* definitions of representational obligation must be addressed once more, this time in the administrative context. Are public administrators trustees of such normative goals as the public interest, social equity, or regime values? Should it be their responsibility to advocate such values and principles, even if the people do not clearly support them?

Or are administrators more like delegates of the people, whose primary concern should be discerning public preferences and demands and responding to the public will? How are professional judgment and popular sovereignty reconciled with each other? If they are irreconcilable, which should receive priority (Gruncbaum, 1981)? Of course the very nature of professionalism for public administrators turns on the answer to these questions. Is professional judgment fundamentally oriented toward technical expertise or popular will? Which takes priority?

We might be tempted to conclude too quickly that the trustee definition is more appropriate for the administrator, as that is a nonelective role. It might appear that representation through delegation occurs only through a specific overt act, such as election. We might assume that unless the people engage in an act of choosing some individual to represent them, delegation of political responsibility cannot occur. This is not necessarily the case, however. Delegation of authority and responsibility to organizations and categories of personnel also occurs through legislation, including the normal process and, in some states, the initiative of citizens. These are acts of general delegation. Presumably persons who then accept positions within those designated organizations are agreeing to

bear responsibility for carrying out the public will expressed in the law. If that will is not clearly defined in law, we might conclude that there is an implied obligation to discern it through whatever means possible.

Of course the problem with carrying out the delegate role in many such cases is that all too often the legislation, of necessity, does not spell out the public's will with great clarity. Thus the administrator is left with a delegation of public authority and responsibility that does not specify in much detail what is expected. Political conflicts avoided and technical questions unaddressed in the legislative process are passed along to administrators for resolution.

The quandary over delegate versus trustee obligations is embedded in these characteristics of much of our legislation. On the one hand, unresolved political issues call for administrators to act as responsive delegates in arriving at some publicly acceptable actions. On the other hand, technical considerations seem to require trustees who exercise the best professional judgment in getting the job done while serving the broad normative goals of the polity. Consequently the question still remains: Which of these aspects of public policy should take precedence? Should the public administrator be obligated to represent the citizenry primarily as a delegate or as a trustee? Is the answer variable, and if so under what conditions should one or the other become dominant?

Education

It is generally assumed in democratic theory that not only do the sovereign people vote but they cast a more or less informed ballot. One justification for political debate is its educational value. When points of view are exchanged, reason is put to the test of opposing ideas, perception is broadened, information is acquired, and self-interest is tempered by the interests of others. It is through this process of individuals talking to one another and to their political leaders that a public is formed and public opinion is transformed into public judgment (Yankelovich, 1981). Yankelovich (1991) argues that public officials and other experts have paid too little attention to the development of mature, informed, consistent public judgment from reactive, emotional, ill-informed, and inconsistent public opinion. On the basis of experimental research, he prescribes the necessary stages of this process in ways helpful to administrators.

In the classic democratic formulation, the key actors in this educational process of debate and deliberation are the citizenry and their elected representatives. However, in the modern administrative state, the role of the career public administrator must be accounted for in some way. Some administrators are close to the problems, possess specialized knowledge and technical expertise, have ongoing relationships with their clientele groups, and tend to maintain

longer tenure in government than most politicians. These appear to be essential participants in the democratic educational process, and their contributions seem necessary for the full development of public judgment.

However, the obligations of this aspect of the administrative role—teaching and learning through public deliberation—are neither clearly defined nor generally acknowledged. For example, one can read the entire winter 1985 issue of the *Kettering Review* (devoted to exploring how the public learns the public's business, with articles by thoughtful individuals such as Derek Bok, Daniel Yankelovich, Robert MacNeil, Geraldine Ferraro, and David Mathews) and be left with the impression that public administrators have no role to play in this process. This journal—generally insightful, sophisticated, and “dedicated to improving the quality of public life in the American democracy”—makes no mention of public administrators as significant participants in the public dialogue. The classical assumptions, focusing exclusively on the citizens and their political leaders, seem not to have been revised here for the modern administrative state. The media and the university community are acknowledged, but not the bureaucrats who run our governments on a day-to-day, year-to-year basis.

However, if the obligation of public administrators for a key educational role in the public policy process is to be established, there are difficult questions to be answered and issues to be resolved. The obligation for informing and educating elected officials behind the scenes is generally accepted. Analyzing data, conducting research, preparing briefing papers, providing evaluation studies, and developing cost estimates for elected officials on request are all well within the classical view of public administrators as nonpolitical instruments in the hands of politicians. But once we move away from that view, how do we redefine the obligations and responsibilities of administrators for educating politicians and learning from them? How should we understand the educational relationship between administrators and politicians in the policy process?

For example, is there an obligation to go beyond the reactive mode of providing information only when requested? Should the administrator role include preparing and disseminating information not requested? Should an agency administrator feel obligated to plan and conduct a systematic educational process, formal or informal, for politicians? Should this include a deliberate challenge of political positions that do not appear to be well grounded in factual knowledge, of values and principles that are inconsistent with the American political tradition, or of proposals that rest on faulty methods? Public administrators use these approaches from time to time, but should we now include them among the defined professional obligations?

Furthermore, should we sometimes expect administrators to carry on this educational process not behind the scenes but out on center stage, in full public

view? If politics and administration cannot be neatly separated, does it make sense to think in terms of the total subordination of the administrative role to the political one? Or should we understand administrative obligations as including the chastening of political whims and passions with information, expertise, and experience? If public administrators are “citizens in lieu of the rest of us,” should we not hold them responsible for publicly asking the hard questions and articulating the counterarguments that expand and balance political debate, so that their fiduciary obligations are visibly executed?

Likewise, how should we understand the obligation of the public administrator to learn from elected officials? The professional perspectives of the administrator, rooted in specialized knowledge, technical expertise, and clientele relationships, may need to be leavened with political knowledge of particular constituencies and the ways of legislative bodies. Administrative specialists can become narrowly focused and isolated from the texture of the political community. They may be overly influenced by client groups and too firmly convinced of the “one best way” of getting the job done. They may forget the importance of political support, not only in adopting policy but also in carrying it out. Legislative proposals, administrative rules and regulations, and agency implementation plans may need to be informed regularly by political realities.

In addition to a mutual obligation for mutually educative interaction between administrators and elected officials, we must also think through a similar relationship between citizens and public administrators. Perhaps administrators who cultivate the kind of relationship with politicians just outlined should be prepared to offer two kinds of knowledge to the citizenry. The first is their own substantive knowledge of particular policy arenas and issues, and the second is procedural knowledge about how government works. If public administrators are indeed “the especially responsible citizens who are officials,” should not teaching their fellow citizens these things be among their central responsibilities? If the rest of us are to be able to carry out our citizenship obligations, is it not essential that citizen-administrators provide us with their best technical information and judgments, in an understandable form, as well as a more effective understanding of how both the bureaucracy and the legislative process work?

Communicating substantive information to the public is essential if self-government is to be even approximated. Should not public administrators understand this as an ongoing, primary role obligation that cannot be set aside or curtailed in order to get on with the job? Is that not the most fundamental job, apart from which administrative efficiency is shortsighted and doomed to failure?

Should we not also agree that career public administrators are likely to be the best civics teachers available to the citizenry? Experience with students, especially undergraduates, suggests that one of the weakest links in our democratic process

is the teaching of young people about how their government really works. Somehow they arrive at the university with, at best, a wooden, oversimplified conception of the way public policy is formed and implemented. This caricature, acquired from textbooks, is carried over into adult life. Quite understandably then, most of our citizens have little or no interest in government because it appears boring in the extreme, or they become quickly disillusioned over the gap between the world as it is and the world as they would like it to be. In either case they remain aloof and disengaged from activities that appear to be either dull or beyond their powers.

Administrators engaged with the governmental process on a daily basis may be the best sources of a richer and more interesting knowledge of its practical workings. How can we best conceptualize a public educational obligation for administrators? Might it call for an expanded understanding of how administrators are involved in policymaking, perhaps as procedural coaches or tutors for citizens as well as substance experts? Yankelovich's work (1991) suggests that administrators have a potentially significant role to play in helping citizens move from public opinion to public judgment.

Now let us turn to the reciprocal aspect of the educative obligation between administrators and citizens. Is there not the responsibility to learn from citizens as well as teach them? If administrators stand in a representative relationship to the citizens, is it not essential that they understand the perspectives, problems, perceived needs, and priorities of citizens? Because administrators control focused public resources, are they not obliged to reach out beyond their clientele groups and political allies to help cultivate a public conversation? David Mathews (1985) argues persuasively that a democratic public cannot form and act on its own behalf without such ongoing conversation. It cannot move beyond public opinion to public knowledge, and finally to public judgment, without this communication. Mathews insists that "a democratic community begins with—in fact, is—a conversation of people talking to one another. If the public is not talking, there is no democratic state" (p. 60). Unfortunately Mathews's assumption seems to be that only elected officials and the media bear the responsibility for this communicative process. Does that not amount to the omission of an enormous set of actors with knowledge, experience, and resources? Should we not agree that the administrative role also carries with it a central obligation to stimulate this conversation among citizens and to learn from it?

Moore (1995) refers to this kind of engagement as "public deliberation" in which citizens must come to grips with conflicting viewpoints expressed by others and in the process seek some kind of accommodation, some form of "public value." He views this kind of "social learning" as a key responsibility of government leadership.

We tend to assume that public deliberation can occur only on a relatively small scale, but we have seen the emergence of various techniques for conducting large-scale deliberation. One excellent example is the work being done by America Speaks, under the leadership of Carolyn Lukensmeyer. The organization has conducted deliberative exercises for as many as five thousand people, using a combination of technology and skilled facilitation. The assumption underlying this work is that public officials and the public can learn from each other in complex ways. Specific projects are described on the America Speaks Web site (www.americaspeaks.org), and the organization's newest and most widely available offering is an online forum, The American Square (theamericansquare.org).

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Implementation

Finally, the third aspect of the policy process that gives rise to ethical issues about the administrative role in a political environment is implementation. In the classical paradigm this was the administrative area of responsibility. It was assumed that administrators receive policy decisions adopted by the politicians and then apply their best functional rationality to putting them into practice. Administrators were expected to use their professional judgment about the most efficient means for achieving the purposes defined by the legislative process.

However, once we acknowledge the inescapably political nature of the public administrative role, the obligations of the administrator in implementation are no longer so clear. For example, as legislative proposals often originate through administrative initiative, what obligation should the administrator bear for specifying at the outset how a proposed policy would likely be implemented? Should tentative rules, regulations, standards, and time schedules be considered along with the policy statement during legislative debate, rather than be left until later for administrators to handle, as is typically the case now? Would this serve the purpose of making administrative action more visible, and therefore more politically accountable?

Also, we face again a problem raised in the earlier discussion of the representational obligations of the public administrator. How should we expect administrators to balance professional expertise with representation of the citizen during the implementation phase? Aside from whatever is currently required by law for citizen participation in the implementing of policies, should public administrators bear an ethical obligation for representing the interests, preferences, and demands of the people throughout this process? If so, is the trustee or the delegate perspective more appropriate here at the implementation stage? Should we understand the administrators' best professional judgment as tantamount

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to the trustee approach to representation and therefore sufficient? Or should we expect administrators, in implementing policies, to think of themselves as delegates in need of regular instructions from the people? Is there an appropriate shift from delegative representation in the adoption stage, as policy is being formed, to a trustee perspective in implementation, as technical judgments are most prominent at that point? Or again, is the appropriate perspective variable from policy to policy, depending on complexity, specificity, scope, significance of probable impact, and other factors?

Conclusion

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From these three aspects of the public policy process—representation, education, and implementation—a plethora of ethical issues emerges concerning the proper definitions of the administrative role in an unavoidably political context. No answers have been provided, but the questions raised begin to sketch out an agenda for normative theory development.

These attributes of the administrative role in modern and postmodern society and the ethical concerns that emerge from them lead quite naturally to a consideration of administrative responsibility. The next chapter begins this consideration with a discussion of the origins of the term *responsibility* and two ways of conceptualizing it.



CHAPTER FOUR

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

The Key to Administrative Ethics

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Responsibility is the key concept in developing an ethic for the administrative role. Frederick Mosher (1968) once observed, “Responsibility may well be the most important word in all the vocabulary of administration, public and private” (p. 7). Two major aspects of that concept, as defined by Mosher, are used here: subjective responsibility and objective responsibility.

When you are confronted with a problem over what you should do in a given situation, you are experiencing the need to define your responsibility in the administrative role. For example, assume that you are an administrator in a federal agency that allocates funds to state agencies for highway construction. Your organization’s mission is to review proposed highway routes for their anticipated environmental impact. Highway projects that significantly affect the environment require an environmental impact statement (EIS); others do not. One section of a federal law mandates that highways constructed with federal money may not have an impact on or use public parkland unless it has been determined that there is no feasible and desirable alternative—a determination that is normally made by conducting an EIS.

A member of your staff comes to you with a problem. She has recently met with officials from a certain state to discuss a proposed highway improvement. The existing highway is narrow, with no shoulders, and is heavily used by elementary school students on bicycles and on foot. It is extremely unsafe, as the number of accidents clearly indicates. The school board, the parents’ association, the local

newspaper, the council of churches, and state highway officials are all calling for immediate action to widen the highway and alleviate these hazardous conditions. The problem, according to the state highway planners, is that widening the road sufficiently would require taking a strip of land five feet wide by one hundred feet long from a fifty-acre municipal park. This can be done within the law, but an EIS must be prepared to identify and justify the environmental impact. This process typically takes two years to complete.

You are responsible for complying with the law under which your organization operates, but you also believe your responsibility is to help reduce the hazardous road condition as quickly as possible. Two types of responsibility can be identified in this case. They are sometimes referred to as objective responsibility and subjective responsibility (Mosher, 1968; Winter, 1966). *Objective responsibility* has to do with expectations imposed from outside ourselves, whereas *subjective responsibility* concerns those things for which we feel a responsibility. As we shall see, this distinction is not to be understood as a difference between real and unreal; subjective responsibility, as an expression of our beliefs, personal and professional values, and character traits, is just as real as the more tangible manifestations of objective responsibility. These concepts are the main focus of this chapter, as they seem to represent the most common ways in which administrators actually experience problems in defining their responsibility in concrete situations.

Objective Responsibility

The specific forms of objective responsibility discussed here involve two dimensions: accountability and imposed obligation. All objective responsibility involves responsibility *to* someone, or some collective body, and responsibility *for* certain tasks, subordinate personnel, and goal achievement. The former is *accountability* and the latter is *obligation*. Accountability and obligation, responsibility *to* someone else *for* something—these are the dual dimensions of objective administrative responsibility.

Principal-agent theory, in its current use drawn largely from economics, attempts to describe and explain objective responsibility in terms of relationships between those with the primary right to exercise authority (*principals*) and those charged with carrying out their wishes (*agents*). Sappington (1991) identifies the central concern of this perspective as “how the principal can best motivate the agent to perform as the principal would prefer, taking into account the difficulties in monitoring the agent’s activities” (p. 45).

The limitations of this perspective for use in administrative ethics are that it oversimplifies the principal-agent relationship; it focuses on the single value of efficiency and fails to deal with the ethical dimensions. The public administrator's role as an agent is complicated by responsibility to multiple principals, including organizational superiors, political officials, professional associations, and the citizenry. Although efficiency is highly important in administrative work, it is not necessarily the most important value; justice, rights (such as privacy), honesty, and a whole host of other values must also be considered. The need to deal with conflicts among principals and competing values, and between accountability and obligation, requires ethical reflection and analysis generally ignored by principal-agent theory (De George, 1992; Dees, 1992).

In terms of relative importance, obligation is the more fundamental, whereas accountability is the means for ensuring the fulfillment of obligation in a hierarchical structure. Accountability implies superior-subordinate relationships and the exercise of authority from the top down to maintain the flow of work toward the achievement of mandated goals. If we explicate these two aspects of objective responsibility in the organizational and political contexts of the public administrative role, we can clarify the relationships among the key actors in the policy process in terms of responsibilities. They will be ordered from more to less proximate relationships of accountability and from less to more fundamental relationships of obligation.

First, public administrators are most immediately responsible to their organizational superiors for carrying out the superiors' directives and also mutually agreed-on goals and for the conduct of their own subordinates. They must be able to explain their conduct and allocation of time and other resources as consistent with the work plan and objectives of the organization, whether the plan and objectives result from orders originated in a strict hierarchical fashion or from some collaborative decision-making process. This is the most proximate relationship of accountability, involving a regular reporting process. However, the relationship of obligation here is the least fundamental. The organization's work plan, specific objectives, and task assignments are simply instrumental. They are pursuant to policies established in the political arena.

Objective responsibility also for the actions of subordinates is essential to the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy. Superiors must direct the activities of those under their supervision, provide resources for accomplishing the work, delegate adequate authority for assigned duties, and monitor performance. They in turn are held accountable for how their subordinates use the resources provided and exercise delegated authority toward the fulfillment of an assignment. This assumes of course that superiors are also accountable for clearly defining the assigned duties in the first place and, wherever discretion is allowed, delineating

its boundaries. Subordinates are instructed to refer to their superiors any decisions that exceed the stipulated bounds of discretion, and thus the superiors maintain ultimate responsibility.

Second, public administrators are responsible to elected officials for carrying out their wishes as embodied in public policies. Such policies are collectively determined for legislative acts, singly determined for executive orders. As we have seen previously, this obligation includes both preparing policy proposals and implementing legislation and executive orders. Administrators must be able to explain their actions and use of resources as consistent with legislative intent or the intent of executive orders. This relationship of legal accountability is less proximate than the first because it involves relatively infrequent reporting, but it is a more fundamental obligation. As public policy is the basis for the organizational mandate and mission, obligations to those who establish policy supersede obligations to organizational superiors.

Finally, public administrators are responsible to the citizenry for discerning, understanding, and weighing citizens' preferences, demands, and other interests. They may respond to these interests by changing programs within existing law or recommending new legislation to elected officials. Administrators must be able to explain their conduct to the citizenry as consistent with either the wishes of the citizenry or the larger public interest. This is the least proximate relationship of accountability, with only very infrequent and often indirect reporting of conduct and achievements. It is, however, the most fundamental relationship of obligation, because the citizens are sovereign and public administrators are their fiduciaries. Sharing representative and fiduciary functions with elected officials in modern democratic society means that this relationship of obligation is also shared. For both groups this is the source of role ambiguity and conflict.

One final word about the nature of accountability in all three relationships is in order. Accountability may be understood in both practical and ethical terms. The responsible administrator must be prepared to answer for conduct from both perspectives, but ethical accountability must finally prevail. Generally we should assume that an administrator will be expected to explain actions from a practical perspective in terms such as cost effectiveness, efficiency, economy, feasibility, and productivity, and from an ethical perspective according to values and principles such as equity, equality, freedom, truthfulness, beneficence, human dignity, privacy, and democracy. The practicality of conduct is never sufficient in and of itself. Unless a course of action can be adequately explained on ethical grounds, it is not a responsible act. The full meaning of responsibility requires ethical as well as practical accountability. To illustrate these concepts, I will use the federal highway case introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

Responsibility to Elected Officials Through Support for the Law

Your responsibility as a public administrator to elected officials through compliance with the law is a matter of objective responsibility. You are expected to behave according to the wishes of those set in authority over you. Here the expectations are those of duly elected legislators expressed in a legally codified statement. That legislation prescribes how you are to conduct yourself when the construction of highways affects public parkland, apart from your own feelings about the matter.

Objective responsibility involves accountability to someone else and obligation for a particular standard or category of performance. It is objective in that the source of accountability and obligation lies outside yourself. Objective responsibility is not the result of a series of decisions you made about what ought to be done. Rather it flows from the decisions of others about what someone occupying your administrative position ought to do. Your decision to accept the position is understood to be tantamount to accepting these expectations and constraints. Objective responsibility projects generalized obligations for all who fill this type of position, without any attempt to acknowledge the individual needs, limitations, preferences, or predilections of a particular incumbent. It is through these external generalized obligations that the role is structured, given its distinctive content, and maintained through changing times, incumbents, and situations. It is through hierarchical arrangements that accountability is maintained. The stability and continuity of the role are rooted in these two aspects of objective responsibility.

Responsibility to the laws governing your organization and your conduct within it is one form of objective responsibility for your role as a public administrator. Ultimately, of course, legal responsibility includes an obligation to uphold the Constitution. Through the Constitution and specific pieces of legislation consistent with it, the intentions of the citizenry for those employed in the public service are presumed to be formally expressed. Inherent in the fiduciary nature of the public administrative role is the objective responsibility to the law. Legal mandates for public agencies are a manifestation of those agencies' primary obligation to serve the public's interests, not the interests of the people employed by the agencies. Responsibility to the law is a constant reminder that public organizations and their administrators exist on behalf of the public.

Thus in the highway-widening case you are held accountable for acting consistently with your obligations under the law that governs the use of parkland. Your personal opinion about the relative importance of highway safety versus park space is not the controlling factor; that factor is the course of action that the law requires of you as an agent of the public. In accounting for your conduct and

justifying your decision, it will not be sufficient to explain that you “have loved that park since you were a kid and just couldn’t stand to see it whittled away for a highway.” This would likely be viewed as irresponsible conduct.

Responsibility to Superiors and for Subordinates

In addition to the law there are numerous other objective sources of responsibility for public administrators: organizational rules and policies, official job descriptions, and professional standards. However, alongside law, the most prominently experienced objective responsibility is to the hierarchical accountability structure of the organization for which you work: your responsibility to organizational superiors and your responsibility for the conduct of subordinates.

Paul Appleby (1952) has argued that hierarchy is “the formal structure and instrument of responsibility” (p. 340). The chain of command, with its successive delegations of responsibility, is the means by which the generalized intentions of the law are approximated in concrete programs and services. Successive approximations of general legal intent are achieved by specifying accountability for particular aspects of the total task. Particular organizations and individuals are held responsible for implementing specific portions of the legal mandate or providing support for others in fulfilling their responsibility.

Whatever individuals working within the hierarchies of governmental organizations may feel about those hierarchies, they are the formally accountable means of maintaining conduct that is consistent with the wishes of the citizenry. Appleby (1952) insists that only through “loyalty upward disciplined by the sanctions of hierarchy” (p. 228) can the public be maintained at the highest level in democratic decision making. Public servants may very well feel constrained and limited in their range of discretion by the chain of command, but that is one of the intended functions of organizational structure. The personal preferences of individual public employees must be subjugated to the popular will, presumably as communicated through the organizational chain of command.

From Appleby’s perspective this is accomplished by making officials at the top of the hierarchy responsible for the conduct of those below. Then, as diverse public preferences and demands are introduced at various subordinate levels of the organizational structure, they are pushed upward for resolution. Those with greater objective responsibility for conformity to law and popular will are held accountable for reconciling these multiple, often conflicting, demands. According to Bailey (1965), this view of the objective responsibility of hierarchies assumes that “the basic morality of the system is in its forcing of unitary claims into the mill of pluralistic considerations” (p. 283) as they move upward.

Once again the case of the highway and the park exemplifies this process. The member of your staff who laid the problem before you recognized there

were conflicting public demands that she was not competent to resolve at her level of responsibility. The law, expressing the presumed intent of the citizenry of the nation, clearly required an EIS, but the local public, as represented by the newspaper, churches, school board, parents' association, and state highway officials, was primarily concerned about the expeditious widening of the road. Her only responsible option was to carry the problem up the chain of command to the next level.

Authority and *politics* are the key concepts for understanding this upward movement. At any given level in the hierarchy, when there is a political conflict and insufficient authority to resolve it, it becomes necessary to move the problem up the ladder of responsibility. When it reaches an organizational level at which there is both responsibility for resolving the conflict and authority to do so, then a decision can and should be made. If, for example, you have been delegated the authority to make exceptions to the legal requirement for an EIS, then you are obligated to decide whether to do so in this case. However, if you have not been authorized by your superiors to grant exceptions, the problem will need to be pushed upward until it reaches someone with that authority and obligation.

Another possibility is that you may have the authority to resolve the issue and attempt to do so, but some significant actors in the political arena may not be satisfied with the outcome and may appeal to those higher in the chain of command to review and override your decision. In matters of serious consequence this movement up the hierarchy may reach the top of the organizational pyramid without being settled and eventually find its way into the judicial system for resolution.

One of the pathologies of bureaucratic organizations is a failure among administrators to exercise responsibility when they are in fact authorized and obligated to make a given decision (Barnard, 1952). Passing the buck up the chain of command because you do not want to bear your obligation for deciding is just as irresponsible as acting when you are not authorized to do so or allowing subordinates to engage in misconduct. This reluctance to accept the share of the responsibility delegated to you results in superiors' being inundated with decisions they should not have to make, thus leaving subordinates without adequate direction. It distorts the organizational structure and impedes the flow of work.

Nevertheless, the objective responsibility that an administrator experiences from the organizational hierarchy must not be viewed as the rigid, one-way process exemplified by the strictest interpretation of the Weberian ideal type (Weber, 1946). Carl Friedrich (1952) has criticized Weber's model precisely at this point; it does not sufficiently acknowledge the possibility of consultation and cooperation between levels of the organization. The exercise of objective responsibility within the hierarchy should not involve a simple flow of directives from top to bottom;

it should be far more complex and dynamic. The apparently fixed subordinate-superior relationships should in fact be somewhat fluid because of the need for consultation and for sharing information up and down the hierarchy. Superiors in any bureaucratic organization are highly dependent on the specialized knowledge and experience of subordinates. Subordinates in turn need to consult regularly with those above them about legal requirements, clarification of agency regulations, and political considerations. Appleby's normative view of this process has been described by Egger (1965) as "the structuring of a network of intelligence and communication which provides a matrix of abundantly diverse and catholic values and influences for the decisions of a pluralistic society" (p. 307).

Hugh Hecllo (1975) has described the responsibility of individual public administrators in terms that are generally consistent with those of Appleby. It was Appleby's belief that, far from being the docile submissive implementer, "the function of an administrator was to complicate the lives of his political masters at least to the extent of assuring that they did not resolve complex issues on the basis of disingenuously simple criteria" (Egger, 1965, p. 307). Hecllo (1975) referred to this active, even aggressive role of the administrator as one of exercising "neutral competence." By that he meant that the role does not require the conduct of a docile and simply compliant automaton but "a strange amalgam of loyalty that argues back, partisanship that shifts with the changing partisans, independence that depends on others" (p. 82). Both Appleby and Hecllo were describing the responsibility of the top levels of administration to political officials; however, the mode of conduct they suggest seems generally appropriate for all levels of the administrative hierarchy.

The objective responsibility of any public administrator to the chain of command does not imply a passive acceptance of directives from above or the unilateral issuance of orders to those below. It includes the systematic filtering upward of information that will complicate the lives of superiors in the sense of providing a more accurate representation of issues and the regular clarification downward of acceptable norms for conduct. If democratic government is to be maintained in a modern pluralistic society, those with authority and responsibility for making decisions should do so with full knowledge of relevant technical information, public opinion trends, positions of interest groups, interpretations of the law, past practice, the views of interested elected officials, the perspectives of other governmental agencies, and the best informed judgment of subordinates, both practical and ethical. Those in subordinate positions should act with clear directives from above about the publicly mandated mission of the organization, and these directives should be based on full knowledge of all relevant factors.

When your staff member came to you with the problem of the highway and the park, she was acting responsibly from the perspectives of Appleby and Hecllo

if she complicated your life with relevant information about a decision she did not have authority to make. If, for example, she informed you that in addition to support of the project from the churches, school board, parents' association, newspaper, and state highway officials, there was also opposition from other quarters, she would be carrying out her objective responsibility. She might also have responsibly told you that the state environmental agency, the municipal parks and recreation commission, the local chapter of the Sierra Club, a home owners' association in the area surrounding the park, and a city council member from that district were strongly opposing the highway project and threatening litigation. And she might have apprised you of the possibility of a more expensive alternative course of action that would involve a realignment of the highway but would permit the use of industrial property on the opposite side of the roadway instead of the parkland.

The objective responsibility of public administrators to the hierarchy of an organization includes not only taking decisions up the chain of command when the administrators' authority has been transcended by the magnitude of an issue but also passing along as much information as needs to be considered in arriving at a decision. This is not only a matter of individual responsibility but also, when summed throughout an entire organization or an entire government, the responsible conduct of the public's business. Wilensky (1967) has demonstrated that the flow of intelligence through an organization is essential not only for the organization's survival but also, and more important, for achieving democratic values.

The dysfunctions of this hierarchical system are well documented (Merton, 1952). With particular concern for the flow of information, Tullock (1965) and Perrow (1972) identify two types of problems. Tullock describes the tendency for subordinates to withhold or distort information, whereas Perrow argues that superiors often receive appropriate information but are unwilling to use it. The common motivation in both cases is the desire to protect self-interests. Subordinates tend to filter out information that may upset the boss and create problems for themselves, and those higher in the chain of command tend to suppress information that is not favorable to their positions.

The difficulty here is centered in a lack of congruence between subjective and objective responsibility. We will return to the problem of incongruity between these forms of responsibility in Chapters Five and Six. For now, suffice it to say the assumption here is that it is not necessarily bureaucratic organization itself that gives rise to these problems. On the basis of years of applied research on hierarchical organizations, Elliott Jaques (1976) argues that bureaucracies are "dependent institutions, social instruments, taking their initial objectives and characteristics from the associations which employ them" (p. 2). Jaques insists that bureaucratic organizations can be effective and humane tools for a

democratic society. We will return to his prescription for “requisite” organizations in Chapter Seven.

Responsibility to the Citizenry

A third form of objective responsibility is an obligation to serve the public interest. Whether by formal oath, government code of ethics, or legislative mandate, all public administrators are ultimately responsible for measuring their conduct in terms of the public interest. However, it is impossible to identify any definition of the *public interest* that would receive widespread support among either scholars or practitioners. The public interest has been examined by political theorists like Richard Flathman (1966), but in 1990 Charles Goodsell commented that there had been no serious treatment of the concept in the public administration literature since 1957. That situation has improved only slightly since 1990, with a recent treatment of the concept by Douglas Morgan (2001). However, it remains true that public administrators have shown little sustained interest in public interest theory. The result is that public administrators are confronted with an array of alternatives for conceptualizing the public interest, left to fend for themselves, and expected to serve this confusing idea even though it is a far less specific and concrete form of objective responsibility than either the will of elected officials embodied in law or the organizational chain of command (Held, 1970).

The confounding paradox is that it is assumed that an indefinite concept of this kind should guide our judgment in responding to these two far more definite and proximate sources of obligation. It is not surprising then that as a practical matter, we either treat the public interest as the object of lip service, along with the flag, motherhood, and apple pie, or we reduce it to balancing power in a political struggle along the lines of the pluralist tradition, with its interest group theory, as discussed in Chapter Three. In the former case we may have been exposed to abstract philosophical treatises that have convinced us that the public interest is impossible to define and has little to do with the realities of life in a governmental agency (Friedrich, 1962). In the latter instance we may have internalized the pluralist notion that balancing organized interests is the way democracy in a mass society approximates the general well-being of the citizenry (Harmon, 1969).

The public interest is clearly a problematic concept. None of the attempts at defining it has been very useful in providing guidance for the practicing administrator. And yet it remains in our political tradition, our legislation, our official codes of ethics, our political debates, our campaign rhetoric, and our deepest reflections during times of profound crisis such as Watergate and the Vietnam

War. It remains a part of our thinking about the ends of public policy and the responsibility of public servants—and rightly so.

The function served by the concept of public interest is not so much one of defining specifically what we ought to do or even providing operational criteria for particular decision-making problems. Rather the public interest stands as a kind of question mark before all official decisions and conduct. The administrator's primary obligation as a member of the citizenry to serve the public interest should cause him or her to ask whether all relevant interests have been considered, whether "the interests and welfare of more inclusive populations than self, family, clan, or tribe" are accounted for in any decision (Waldo, 1974, p. 267).

Has the range of viewpoints represented in the development of your policy recommendations, program implementation plans, or service delivery guidelines been too restricted? Are you and your staff listening to opinions that run contrary to your own or to opinions that would not benefit the organization politically? Have you seriously considered the gains and losses of those not represented in the hearing room or the advice of experts or the lobbying process?

The obligation to serve the public interest should always cause administrators and elected officials to feel a little uneasy, not quite sure that everyone worth hearing has been heard. That is its most practical function. The fulfillment of this objective responsibility is to be found neither in adopting a Benthamite utilitarian formula nor in promulgating a universal blueprint for society but in a mind-set. It is a matter of carrying out your duties as though you might be required to stand before the assembled populace and explain your conduct.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann observed, in an often quoted remark, that the public interest is "what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, acted disinterestedly and benevolently" (quoted in Held, 1970, p. 205). Admittedly this is an extremely general statement, with a significant "if" in the middle. However, it does suggest an attitude in dealing with the public's business that is more than rhetoric. It is not unlike the conditions stipulated by John Rawls (1971) as the necessary prerequisites for arriving at principles of justice that can be defined as "fair."

Rawls (1971) insists that anyone who attempts to reflect on this problem should do so from the "original position," that is, without consideration for his or her own social, cultural, economic, or biological circumstances. We should attempt to reason about the requirements of justice as though we did not know our own social class, natural assets and abilities, intelligence, strength, or even the political and economic characteristics of our society. He terms this perspective "the veil of ignorance." One of the basic conclusions Rawls reaches by reasoning from this assumed vantage point is this: "All social primary goods—liberty

and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally *unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored*” (p. 19, emphasis added). In other words, if none of us knew what our actual situation in society was, according to Rawls, we would all think it just to distribute these goods equally or in a way that would increase the advantages of those who turn out to be among the least favored. We would do so because from behind “the veil of ignorance,” it would be in our interest to do so; none of us would want to run the risk of winding up among the disadvantaged without these provisions.

This very limited treatment of the complex and carefully reasoned philosophy of John Rawls is included only to suggest the attitude required of administrators in serving the public interest, an attitude built on rationality and benevolence, both inclusive and projected over the long run. It is an attitude that attempts to eschew short-run personal gains and resists immediate pressures. It is a frame of mind that struggles to maintain a commitment to an evolving social system, a vision of the distant future, and a sense of equity that excludes none. It assumes that public servants can realize that they are primarily members of the public, whose fortunes will rise or fall with the concern and fairness exercised in the conduct of the public’s business.

Subjective Responsibility

Externally imposed obligations are only one dimension of responsibility. Alongside these are our own feelings of responsibility and beliefs about responsibility. Objective responsibility arises from legal, organizational, and societal demands on our public administrator role, but subjective responsibility is rooted in our own beliefs about loyalty, conscience, and identification. Subjective responsibility in carrying out our administrative role reflects the kind of professional ethic developed through personal experience that was discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two. We believe in being legal, and so we are compelled by our conscience to act in a particular way, not because we are required to do so by a supervisor or the law but because of an inner drive composed of beliefs, values, and character (the latter understood as predispositions to act in certain ways). These internal sources of responsibility may begin as external standards and expectations that become internalized over time through training and socialization.

Faced with the highway problem, for example, even though you may have no specific objective responsibility for reducing hazardous conditions, nevertheless

you may have an intense concern for the safety of children. All the law requires of you is to prepare an environmental impact statement when parkland is involved. That is also what the hierarchy of your agency expects of you. The one source of objective responsibility that may require more of you is the obligation to serve the public interest. However, that is such an abstract and elusive notion that it may not serve even the purpose of expanding the perspective of the decision maker, unless he or she has a strong sense of subjective responsibility. Sometimes subjective responsibility reinforces a person's objective responsibilities, and sometimes not. Sometimes it moves the public interest obligation to the forefront, and at other times it obscures it altogether.

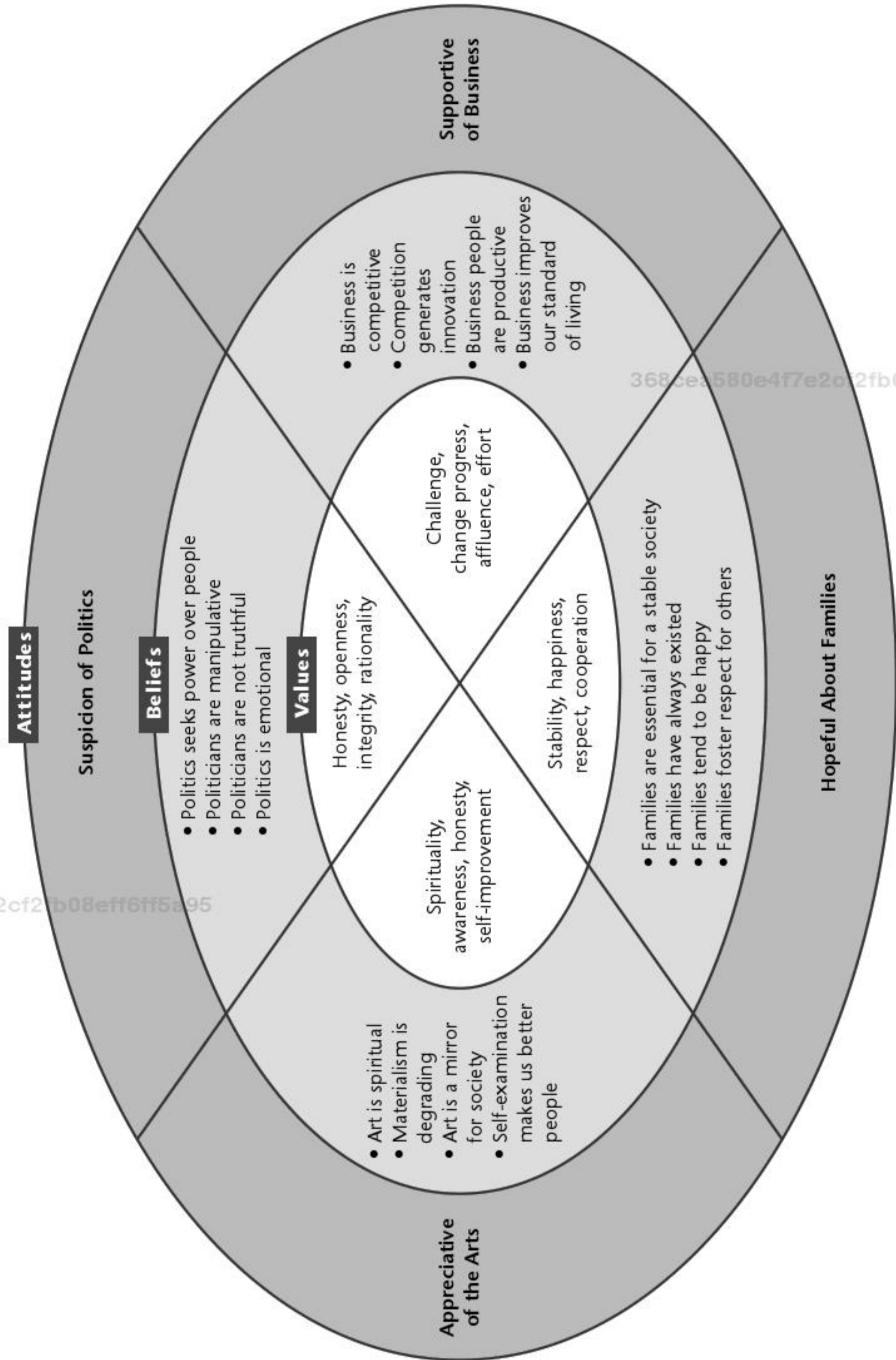
Our feelings and beliefs about responsibility to someone or for something emerge from the socialization process. They are manifestations of values, attitudes, and beliefs we acquire from family, school, religious affiliation, friends, professional training, and organizational involvement. Through these experiences we begin to perceive patterns in physical nature and in the behavior of others that become a part of our cognitive system.

According to Rokeach (1970), these beliefs may be descriptive ("I believe rain is a form of water"), evaluative ("I believe rain is good for the earth"), or prescriptive ("I believe experiments to increase rainfall should be encouraged") (pp. 112–113). These beliefs, Rokeach explains, are organized into attitudes as they become oriented around types of situations. They are relatively enduring and tend to create within us predispositions to respond in a consistent fashion to particular situations—another way of saying that they contribute to the development of both character (predispositions) and integrity (consistency of conduct over time).

Values are types of beliefs more basic than other beliefs we may hold; they are central to our belief systems and thus to our attitudes. They are beliefs about how we ought to behave and about the desirability of certain end states. Figure 4.1 shows three concentric circles: values are located in the innermost circle, indicating their fundamental relationship to the more specific beliefs one holds; beliefs lie in the middle ring; and attitudes are placed in the outer circle to suggest that they are generalized composites of values and beliefs (see also Wright, 1971).

Values are powerful influences in human experience. Although I have referred to subjective responsibility as involving feelings, it is important to note that the values from which this kind of responsibility emerges are not simply emotional expressions. They have three components that affect the way we live: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Values not only emerge from our cognitive interaction with our environment but also shape our perceptions as we continue to experience the world. Values also evoke emotional responses to what we perceive;

FIGURE 4.1. BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND VALUES.



Source: Based on Rokeach, 1970.

we have positive and negative feelings associated with what we believe about what we perceive (Drews and Lipson, 1971). The combination of cognitive and affective responses to the physical and social environment creates predispositions within us toward certain kinds of behavior. In other words, what we believe and how we feel about those beliefs affect our character, which shapes our conduct. A value functions as a powerful imperative to action; it is “a standard or yardstick to guide actions” (Rokeach, 1970, p. 160).

As a federal administrator considering the hazardous highway, you may previously have formed an *attitude* of support for any effort that proposes to alter highways for the increased safety for children. This attitude may be composed of a number of *beliefs* about the accident rate on narrow highways, the best means for reducing that rate, the vulnerability of pedestrians and bicycle riders, the special vulnerability of children traveling by these means, and the desirability of walking and riding bicycles instead of being driven in motor vehicles. At a deeper and more determinative level in your cognitive system, there may be some fundamental values about preserving the dignity of human life and the particular importance of protecting children. These values motivate you to feel responsible for expediting the widening of the highway. They cause you to want to take action in that direction.

Such sources of subjective responsibility may be rooted in one or more of our other roles, such as member of a professional or religious association, citizen, or parent. For example, our membership and involvement in the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) may create, through the experiences it provides, a sense of subjective responsibility that influences our conduct in our work role. This may arise from ASPA’s de facto ethical standards expressed through the informal norms of its culture. We acquire these standards through participation in its activities. Note that these may be consistent to varying degrees with ASPA’s espoused ethics set forth explicitly in its code of ethics.

Subjective responsibility is rooted in these basic determinative beliefs that we refer to as values, which become elaborated to greater or lesser degrees as principles. These principles connect values to broad criteria for conduct. As we confront problems and issues, our values, and the principles associated with them, give rise to feelings and inclinations to behave in a certain way or to seek the fulfillment of a particular goal.

Chester Barnard, in *The Functions of the Executive* (1964), has argued that these values and principles are organized into various constellations—which he terms private, unwritten *codes*—governing the conduct of an individual (p. 262). His notion of codes suggests that values and principles are not merely ranked hierarchically but also are structured into subsystems. These normative subsystems are functionally related to the various types of activities in which we

are involved. They serve as unwritten, internal codes of conduct for particular aspects of our lives. Although Barnard does not relate these internal codes specifically to the roles we occupy, it is generally consistent with his conceptual scheme to do so. Identifying internal codes with roles helps to clarify both how they are organized and how they are linked to behavior. Values that are appropriate for defining and structuring a given role function as a subsystem of our total value system, functionally oriented around conduct in a particular role but related also to other value subsystems for other roles.

Roles were described generally in Chapter Three as bundles of obligations and interests. Now the description needs to be elaborated in a more complex fashion. There are two components in the enactment of a role: the objective and the subjective. The objective component consists of those external obligations that were discussed under objective responsibility. They give to the role a structure, stability, predictability, and continuity that approximate the will of the citizenry. The subjective component consists of a subsystem of values and principles that we construct in the process of responding to those objective obligations and expectations. As we assume the role and begin to act it out in making particular decisions, we organize a set of values and principles that guide our specific, personal, individual responses to the generalized objective definition of the role. In this process, elements of a role that began as external expectations may be internalized through socialization and become part of our system of subjective responsibility. The more we internalize the values and principles of a role, the more our behavior is guided by our subjective responsibility and the less we depend on external structures.

In other words, we develop a structure of subjective responsibility that is the counterpart of the objective responsibility imposed from outside ourselves. This is the way we mesh our own needs and idiosyncratic perspectives with the demands of the role. A role evokes within us a need to create a value subsystem, a code for living out its objective responsibilities in a way that is compatible with our own inner inclinations.

This inner code may or may not be significantly informed by some professional consensus about the responsibility of public administrators. When an administrator has not been socialized by a professional community, idiosyncratic personal values derived from other roles may provide the only source for subjective responsibility; no identifiable public service ethical norms shape the conduct of the administrator. In these cases the public role is carried out on the basis of personal values that may or may not be consistent with public expectations. Inconsistency may be discovered only when some significant action by the administrator is found by superiors, political officials, or the public to be at odds with public service norms.

Barnard (1964) also makes a useful distinction between moral status and responsibility. Moral status has to do with the attributes of the inner code for a particular role: “simple or complex, high or low, comprehensive or narrow.” Responsibility is “the power of a particular private code of morals to control the conduct of the individual in the presence of strong contrary desires or impulses” (p. 263). Thus we may have a clearly worked out code for any given role but may not behave consistently in a manner that is congruent with the code. To the extent that our codes do not consistently control our behavior, we may be described as irresponsible. A responsible person’s conduct is not at odds with his or her code for that role.

Sometimes we say that those whose actions are in conflict with what they believe are lacking in integrity. They cannot be trusted because their inner controls are so weak that their behavior is unpredictable and inconsistent. Maintaining a high degree of subjective responsibility is important not only for the sake of our sense of wholeness, self-esteem, and identity—essential as these are to mental health—but also for the fulfillment of our objective responsibility. As Srivastva and Cooperrider (1988) suggest, integrity involves wholeness, not only within ourselves but in our relationships. These authors maintain that integrity is not a single character trait and not limited to particular roles, but rather “a sophisticated state of processing experience in the world that encompasses moral judgment, creativity, and intuitive capability, as well as rational-analytic powers” (p. 5). They further assert that executives who have this kind of integrity “invite trust from others” because they are “consistent in word and deed” (p. 5). More essentially than organization charts and procedures, it is this trust that actually integrates the organization.

Egger (1965) cautions us to be suspicious of the notion that an administrator can function “as a sort of ethical automaton.” He argues, in effect, that the need for logic and consistency in our administrative behavior requires a developed subjective responsibility. The range of administrative discretion that the objective sources of responsibility allow must be structured by “possession of some of the impediments of reflective morality.” An administrator needs “some bench marks for relating the various and frequently conflicting claims of competing values which enter into his official actions” (p. 303). These will not be provided by the law, the courts, or delegated authority; they are too general in nature. According to Egger, sources of subjective responsibility are the means for “the maintenance of a consistent and perhaps corrective ethical continuum to the administrative process” (p. 304).

Consequently subjective responsibility is not only an unavoidable fact of human experience, growing out of our socialization and our other roles, but its conscious and systematic development is essential for carrying out objective responsibility in a consistent, rational, and dependable fashion. Consistent and

powerful internal controls allow administrators to exercise discretion in a pattern that is relatively predictable and therefore engenders trust among associates. The ethical process is the means by which these internal sources of responsibility are related to external demands. Moral imagination is the requisite skill for meshing the two without a loss of integrity. The reflective decision-making approach discussed in Chapter Two outlines the steps for maintaining congruence between values and external obligations associated with the administrative role.

Now let us turn to another case situation and attempt to apply some of these concepts and distinctions related to subjective and objective responsibility.

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“What to Do About Mrs. Carmichael”

The Municipal Redevelopment Agency (MRA) is involved in a project in Victoria, one of the older communities in Urbopolis. Because most of the turn-of-the-century housing is in a seriously dilapidated state, the Urbopolis City Council has declared Victoria an appropriate area for redevelopment.

You have been appointed assistant project director, with primary responsibility for determining which of the houses should be rehabilitated and which must be demolished. You have a staff that includes two specialists in municipal building codes and housing construction. You have assigned them to conduct on-site inspections of the residences in the first project area and prepare a draft report with their recommendations. They are nearing the completion of their fieldwork; another two or three weeks should do it.

Harmon, one of the two specialists, buzzes you on the intercom to say that he and Franklin, the other specialist, need to talk with you as soon as possible about Mrs. Carmichael, who lives in project area 1; in fact, she has lived there for thirty years. Mrs. Carmichael is now eighty-two years old, her husband is deceased, and her income has been so battered by inflation that it barely meets her basic living expenses. The mortgage has been paid off, but there have been taxes and maintenance costs. Some time ago Mrs. Carmichael began to neglect repairs on her home as her money shrank in value. “Now,” Harmon says, “her house is in pretty bad shape.” He sums up the condition of the house by admitting that according to the standards they have been applying elsewhere in the first project area, Mrs. Carmichael’s home should be demolished.

However, Harmon cannot bring himself to recommend the destruction of the old woman’s home. This is his fourth redevelopment project and he has seen it happen before: “Elderly people, whose homes cannot justify rehabilitation loans, are relocated into apartments, or board and care homes, only to lapse into senility and sometimes death.” Harmon never felt very good about it before, and

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he just cannot stand to do it again. He tells you that he knows what the law requires and what the MRA project guidelines specify, but it seems wrong. He argues that “the government has no business treating decent people who have worked hard all their lives as though they were disposable trash.”

You feel moved by Harmon’s concern for Mrs. Carmichael, but you are unsure about what it means for you and the project. It occurs to you that Franklin has said nothing, so you ask if he agrees with Harmon.

No, Franklin does not agree. He feels as strongly as Harmon but not in the same way. “It is too bad about Mrs. Carmichael, and all the Mrs. Carmichaels who get caught in her predicament, but there is nothing *we* can do about it,” says Franklin. He tells you that the MRA’s job is to rehabilitate when it can and demolish when it cannot, and there are laws and rules and standards that must govern those decisions.

Franklin insists that you cannot go around making exceptions; you have to be fair with everyone, and that means treating everyone equally. There must be no special favors, or the entire project will be jeopardized. Everyone will demand an exception, and nothing will get done. The only way to deal with this case is to go by the book. “Let the relocation unit find her a satisfactory place to live—that’s their problem,” Franklin maintains. “Our problem is to make a decision about whether to fix up her place or tear it down.” He knows that the house is beyond repair according to the standards employed by the MRA for all other similar projects.

The tension has been rising between Harmon and Franklin, and at this point a heated argument breaks out between the two men. You try to calm their tempers, and as they settle back into their seats, you express appreciation for both men’s concerns. You assure them that you respect their judgment and indicate that you would like to give the matter some thought and discuss it again later. Harmon and Franklin thank you for hearing them out and then leave your office.

It is not our intention to attempt to resolve the issue of Mrs. Carmichael’s house, but to use this case to illustrate some of the concepts just discussed in this chapter and indicate ways of clarifying the situation that will be helpful in arriving at a decision.

First, consider the facts concerning your objective responsibility. You know the following, for example:

1. The laws related to this redevelopment project clearly authorize the condemnation and demolition of substandard structures. If the owner cannot or will not make the necessary repairs, the building may be torn down.
2. A long series of court cases have upheld this kind of action.
3. The criteria for determining substandard buildings are well defined in the agency guidelines for such projects and in the Urbopolis building and safety code.

4. You are responsible to Bronson, the Victoria Redevelopment Project director, for recommending which buildings should be demolished and which rehabilitated. If it looks as though this case will be a matter of dispute or if you cannot resolve the issue in your own mind, you may have to discuss it with him.
5. You are not sure what your responsibility for upholding the public interest requires of you in this case. You need to ascertain how the public, at least in the Victoria area, feels about it.

Then you review in your mind what you know about Mrs. Carmichael's case and what essential information you need to obtain. You feel reasonably confident about the following:

1. From Harmon's description, the house probably falls into the demolition category. Harmon did not try to soften the hard realities of its condition, and Franklin concurred.
2. Because the house is in such bad shape, it will not qualify for a federal grant or loan large enough to do the work required to avoid condemnation.
3. Mrs. Carmichael could not qualify for a loan from a private lending institution, and she would be unable to make the payments if she did.
4. If demolition takes place, Mrs. Carmichael could not afford to rebuild on the present site.
5. If the agency condemns the house for demolition, Mrs. Carmichael will receive market value for it.

You feel much less certain about several other aspects of the case. You believe that you need to clarify the following:

1. How does Mrs. Carmichael feel about the situation? Harmon is deeply concerned about saving her house, but not once in his presentation of the problem did he report *her* viewpoint. It would be a good idea to stop by and hear her reactions firsthand. Maybe she would like to move into a place that she could manage better.
2. Can she handle a change in residence? What are her mental, emotional, and physical states? Is she in reasonably good health? You know that Harmon is right about the serious negative impact of moving on some older people.
3. What are some options if her house is demolished? Will she have enough money from the agency's purchase of her house to buy another house elsewhere or perhaps a condominium? Maybe she could invest the proceeds and produce enough additional income to afford a nice apartment.

4. Is Mrs. Carmichael truly an exceptional case? Are there other elderly people in the project area who face the same threat? Maybe they should be considered as a group.
5. How do people in the community feel about Mrs. Carmichael's case? Without violating her privacy, is it possible to assess how others believe their interests might be served or subverted by the way her case is handled?

Finally, you reflect on your own personal inclinations. You attempt to clarify in your own mind what your subjective responsibility is with respect to Mrs. Carmichael. After mulling it over for a while, you realize the following:

1. Your general *attitude* toward older people is one of deep respect. Since your boyhood days with your grandparents, you have felt almost a reverence for those who have survived the vicissitudes of the modern world. They evoke within you a deferential feeling.
2. This attitude is composed of a number of *beliefs*. You view older people as having "paid their dues," as having worked hard and deserving our esteem for having done so. You believe young people often do not recognize the valuable knowledge and experience that older people have accumulated. You believe that the elderly are often ignored and mistreated. They generally do not receive what is coming to them.
3. Behind these beliefs are some *values* you have long recognized within yourself. Wisdom about life in the world, based on knowledge and experience, is important to you. Getting the most out of the time allotted to one is something about which you feel deeply. Perseverance in the face of hardship is a significant virtue in your value system. Fairness, or equity, is one of the most essential principles of all. Sensitivity to the feelings of others is another of your values.

On the basis of these reflections, you conclude that your strongest sense of subjective responsibility leads you in the direction of trying to resolve the problem without harming Mrs. Carmichael in any way. You do not want to disturb her life. However, you have other obligations too. You are the administrator responsible for making a recommendation about Mrs. Carmichael's house. You are paid to do that by MRA, and you made a commitment to carry out that responsibility when you accepted the job. It is your objective responsibility, and as long as you hold this position, you may not ignore it.

Also, you have other subjective responsibilities associated with your administrative role. You feel responsible for maintaining morale and a cooperative team spirit among staff members. You value efficiency, and you believe these

qualities are essential for an efficient organization. You also feel responsible for avoiding conflict with the residents of Victoria, both because that would upset the orderly schedule of work and lead to reduced efficiency and because you value the esteem of others. You want the residents to feel that you have been fair with them. Furthermore, you feel responsible to Bronson, the Victoria Project director, and Markham, the executive director of MRA, for maintaining the image of the agency. Loyalty to the organization is important to you.

In determining the best course of action, you may simply respond to the strongest and most definitive sources of objective responsibility—perhaps your superior, the law, or both if they coalesce. Or you may allow deep-seated feelings to function as the decisive factors.

The perspective outlined in Chapter Two assumes that if we want to make ethical decisions in a more intentional and rational manner, we must be more systematic. Working through the steps of the process outlined there is a way of accomplishing this task. As we consider alternative courses of action, their probable consequences, and how each might be defended, we are seeking an acceptable fit among the facts of a situation, our values, and our external obligations. Resolution is achieved when we are able to imagine an alternative that satisfies the need for consistency in our fundamental self-image. This allows us to maintain our sense of integrity, a feeling of being an identifiable whole, someone whom we and others will recognize as the person we imagine ourselves to be. Needless to say, this self-image and sense of integrity should be shaped to a large extent by a normative public administrative identity, by an internalized public service ethic.

Conclusion

Fulfilling our responsibilities is a stressful, complex task in modern society. As should be obvious from this chapter, the management of the administrative role with its dual components is a difficult task in itself. Any reader with administrative experience will realize by this point that it is much more complicated than suggested here. If we begin to consider, for example, the multiplicity of roles that must be maintained by an individual in the urban world today, the thought and energy required can be overwhelming. Conflict among responsibilities related to a single role, compounded by conflicts among several roles, is a regular, even daily experience for public administrators. In the next chapter we examine these conflicts.