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17 ביוני 1996

לאנט שלום רב

(המעבר מ- wordperfect לעבודה עושה שמות במסמך, אך זו חדרך היחידה לחדפיס כאן בעברית. קבלי את התנצלותי מראש.)

א תכנית הלימודים למחזור ה'.

1. מינחל ופוליטיקה

2. קבלת החלטות

3. תהליך המדיניות

4. כתיבת נייר עמדה (הגדרת בעיה וכו')

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6. סוגיות נבחרות:

1) מינחל ציבורי ומינחל עסקי

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ב. חומר קריאה:

1. כללי (לחלוקה לפני תחילת הלימודים) - מציע לנסות הפעם חומר חדש לחלוטין (אלא אם כן יש לך סימפטיה מיוחדת לאחד מהפריטים הקודמים - אני מתלבט אם בכל זאת לכלול את Colman) ר' רשימה מצ"ב (2 פרקים מ- Moore, 1995; Reich, 1988; ופרק אחד מ- Weiner and Wining, 1992).

2. סוגיות - באופן כללי הייתי נשאר עם מרבית פריטי הקריאה, עם חשינויים הבאים:

1) ציבורי-עסקי: בנוסף ל- Allison מציע את- Blum, 1991 מפורט ברשימה המצ"ב

2) ביצוע: בנוסף ל- Majone and Wildavsky מציע את- McDonnell and Elmore, 1999

4) הערכה: בנוסף ל- Lindblom and Cohen מציע את סקירת המבוא של- Anderson and Biddle, 1991

5) ריכוז-ביזור: בנוסף לספר שלי על שלטון מקומי, מציע את- Osborne and Gaebler, 1993

(האם הגזמת?)

אני עדיין "חייב" את שתי הסוגיות האחרונות למחזור ד'. האם יוקצב לכך זמן? האם יש מקום לחשוב על חרתבה (מעבר לשתי הסוגיות) האם יוקצב למחזור ד' זמן מספיק לכתיבת ניירות אמשיים והצגתם?

ממתין לתגובתך. מסרי לי בבקשה איזה חומר איננו נגיש כדי שאוכל לצלם ולשלוח בעוד מועד.

תודה. דוד

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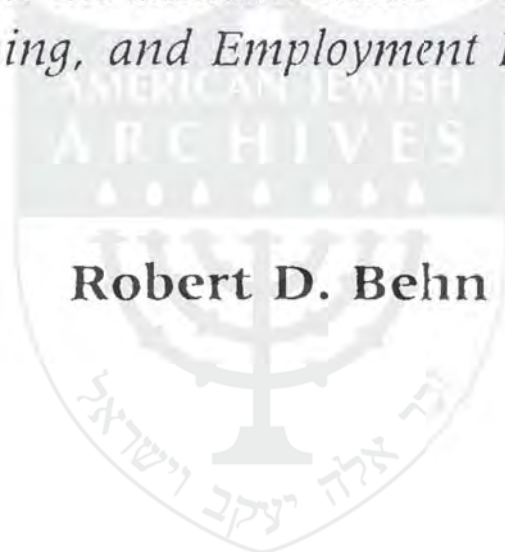
# LEADERSHIP COUNTS

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Lessons for Public Managers

*from the Massachusetts Welfare,  
Training, and Employment Program*

**Robert D. Behn**



1991

Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
London, England



invented with [Deputy Associate Commissioner] Jean Bellow's help, the word ACT. In other words, I was coming up with the first ACTION plan for error reduction, and we came up with ACT." Then, in 1986, Pillsbury "started thinking about the fact that our mission had to change, and that we didn't have any way of saying it. And I tried a number of things." (Pillsbury noted that "I keep saying 'I,' but it was through group discussions and thinking.") The department began to experiment with case management—and to train the line workers in case management—but it did not have a succinct way to summarize the new mission; "we were really struggling," admitted Pillsbury. Then, John O'Sullivan, director of training, and his staff came up with "the case management arrow and out of poverty." Still, continued Pillsbury, "He hadn't gotten it down to it's a 'route out of poverty.' And I came up with something that didn't fly. It was H<sub>2</sub>O: Hope, Help, and Opportunity—H<sub>2</sub>O. That didn't fly. So we just kept working at it until—almost group think—we discovered the words 'route out of poverty.'"

"Groping along" accurately describes the process by which any organization creates the sentences, phrases, and words it uses to describe its purposes. Conversely, this managerial search for words provides a useful metaphor for describing the process of management: "Management by Groping Along," or MBGA.

[...]

### Most Managers Grope—a Lot

An effective manager has an excellent sense of his or her objectives but lacks a precise idea about how to realize them. Nevertheless, the manager does possess some ideas—some deduced from theory, some adapted from past experiences, some coming strictly from hunches—about how to achieve these objectives. Unfortunately, neither the general theories nor the specific techniques in any manager's repertoire are derived from situations precisely like the current one. From the numerous "lessons" that the manager has learned from the past, he must not only choose those that appear to be most appropriate; he must also adapt them to the new, unique task he now faces.

Thus, despite years of experience and study, even the best manager must grope along. He must test different ideas and gauge the results of each. Then he tries different combinations and permutations of the more productive ideas. Rather than develop a detailed strategy to be followed unswervingly, a good manager establishes a specific direction—a very clear objective—and then gropes his way toward it. He knows where he

In part, flexibility is a question of program design. Has the program been put together in a way that is not susceptible to modifications? Is it impossible to fix one problem without redesigning the entire program?

In part, however, flexibility is a question of mental outlook. Do the program's managers think—"know"—that they got the program right the first time? Was the original program so oversold that it is impossible to make changes without a major embarrassment? Or has everyone—from top management to line workers—known from the beginning that they were not working with the perfect program? Have they understood all along that they would have to fix it? If so, the need to make changes will not be so surprising nor will the task of doing so appear so massive. Managers who grope along understand and explain from the beginning that the program will require numerous and periodic changes, modifications, and improvements. Atkins told his agency: "Don't be afraid or ashamed if you discover that something is wrong with the program. Let's approach it with this management style: . . . Get it up and running, and then fix it."

### The Campaign Speech

The value of a succinct statement of mission to the overall management of a business firm<sup>4</sup> or public agency<sup>5</sup> is widely recognized. Often this is summarized in a clever phrase: "IBM Means Service." Ray Kroc's theme for McDonald's was: "Q.S.C. & V.," or "Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value." Yet rarely does a public agency have a clear one-paragraph (or even one-page) statement of purpose, let alone a clever phrase to summarize it. By contrast, over the first five years of ET, the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare had several: "Accuracy, Compassion, Timeliness"; "A Route Out of Poverty"; "Family Independence Plan."

A succinct summary of an agency's mission does not, however, emerge from some single, brilliant insight. It evolves, much as "the speech" of a political candidate evolves during a campaign. The candidate has a sense of the message to be communicated but not which words will achieve that purpose. Thus the candidate gropes along, testing different ideas before different audiences and gauging the reaction to each. Then the candidate tries different combinations and permutations until finally the words and phrases that work best take hold.

"Accuracy, Compassion, Timeliness," recalled Pillsbury, "were the first code words" for conveying a sense of purpose: "We invented that on purpose, and it kind of evolved nicely in that I focused on the mission and felt that it had to consciously be conveyed. And very definitely, I



of small wins": "A small win is a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance. By itself, one small win may seem unimportant. A series of wins at small but significant tasks, however, reveals a pattern that may attract allies, deter opponents, and lower resistance to subsequent proposals. Small wins are controllable opportunities that produce visible results . . . Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that favor another small win." To follow a strategy of small wins, the manager gropes along, from one plateau to the next, building on the lessons from the previous climb to decide what additional capabilities are needed and what the next target should be. "Small wins provide information that facilitates learning and adaptation," writes Weick; "feedback is immediate and can be used to revise theories." Moreover, each new plateau provides a base for the next ascent. "Small wins are stable building blocks," he argues. "They preserve gains."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, "the psychology of small wins" reduces the risk involved in undertaking the next ascent. Indeed, a subsequent target can be chosen that will almost guarantee success. And even if an organization does not attain the next plateau, the failure is not fatal. The impact of all the previous wins still overwhelms this latest loss. (At the gambling tables in Las Vegas, almost everyone tends to pay more attention to the infrequent wins than to the much more frequent losses.) Moreover, observed Weick, the optimal sequence of small wins cannot be planned in advance: "the next solvable problem seldom coincides with the next 'logical' step as judged by a detached observer. Small wins do not combine in a neat, linear, serial form . . . More common is the circumstance where small wins are scattered and cohere only in the sense that they move in the same general direction . . . Careful plotting of a series of wins to achieve a major change is impossible, because conditions do not remain constant."<sup>8</sup> After the next plateau is reached, the manager may discover that the view is nothing special or that this target is no closer to the summit. He must keep groping along toward his ultimate goal.

How the nation's governors describe their own approach to management illustrates the process. "We try a number of things, some work and some don't," Governor Lamar Alexander observed when he was governor of Tennessee.<sup>9</sup> As governor of Utah, the late Scott Matheson would talk about his "flounder system." Although to some of his advisers this phrase "connotes the process of acting clumsily or ineffectively," to Matheson "it represents the natural struggle of government—to move forward and obtain footing in a constantly changing organizational and political climate."<sup>10</sup>

Good managers grope along. But they grope intelligently. They under-



is trying to go but is not sure how to get there. So he tries a lot of different things. Some work. Some do not. Some are partially productive and are modified to see if they can be improved. Finally, what works best begins to take hold. This is "management by groping along."

Some might call it "management through experimentation." Indeed, good managers do experiment a lot. But the verb "to experiment" gives the wrong impression. "Experimentation" suggests that the process is scientific, which it is not.

Admittedly, "to grope" is not exactly the right verb either. The dictionary's definition is "to feel or search about blindly, hesitantly, or uncertainly." The manager is not blind. Off in the distance, he can see clearly the top of the mountain. But between the trailhead and the summit are many paths obscured by trees, ledges, and clouds. The manager is uncertain about which trail will get him there—or whether he should bushwhack. He has a compass, which he has learned to use through study and experience. Unfortunately, however, no one has prepared an up-to-date map of the region, though the manager can easily pick out some of its prominent landmarks, and he has learned from experience the subtleties of detecting some of the less obvious but perhaps even more critical features. He has also tried to pick up the folklore of the mountain from some of the old-timers. But no one has ever climbed this mountain before (and, indeed, most of the old-timers are telling him it is foolish to try). So although the manager can hire a guide who has experience on similar terrain and who can help keep him from falling into a deadly crevice, he will still have to grope his way towards the top. He will not do this blindly, but he will not be very scientific either.

Significantly, however, the experienced manager will not set off immediately for the summit. Rather, he will do the doable first. The manager will pick out a nearby plateau—one with a good view—and set out with his team to conquer it. This approach has several purposes. For one, the manager and his organization are now closer to their ultimate goal. Second, while achieving this intermediate goal, they develop their capabilities—ones they will need to reach the summit. Third, the manager and his organization learn a lot—about themselves as a team and about the additional capabilities they will need. Finally, reaching this first plateau provides a sense of accomplishment. The climb may have been hard but the view (if the manager picked this initial goal cleverly) is gorgeous. The summit may still be a long way off—and still obscured in the clouds—but it no longer appears to be unattainable. Moreover, the naysayers are not quite as vocal, and some additional sponsors and workers have "signed up" with the expedition.

Karl E. Weick, of Cornell University, has advocated such "a strategy

or quantitative marketing research) spawned other books that some now call the "excellence literature."<sup>14</sup>

MBWA is not important because it offers some great, new theory of human or organizational behavior. It is not important because it finally settles through original and creative empirical analysis some fundamental debate among the intellectual giants of the field. MBWA is not important by any of the standard criteria of social science. In fact, Peters and Waterman didn't even coin the phrase; they learned it from one of their excellent companies, Hewlett-Packard. Nevertheless, the idea of management by wandering around is important for both its descriptive and its prescriptive power.

The concept of MBWA is important for its descriptive value. It explains what managers—at least the managers of large, successful firms—do with a good portion of their time. Like the research of Henry Mintzberg of McGill University, it helps us understand what managers really do.

In *The Nature of Managerial Work*, Mintzberg observes that the work of a manager is "characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation."<sup>15</sup> Peters and Waterman say that the manager's work is characterized by a lot of wandering around. Of course, the writing of Peters and Waterman does not look as scientific as Mintzberg's. For example, *In Search of Excellence* contains few graphs; by contrast, one graph in *The Nature of Managerial Work*, entitled "Frequency Distribution of Managerial Activities by Duration (in hours)," shows that desk work averages 15 minutes in duration, telephone calls 6 minutes, scheduled meetings 68 minutes, unscheduled meetings 12 minutes, and tours 11 minutes.<sup>16</sup> Peters and Waterman write simply: "The name of the successful game is rich, informal communication."<sup>17</sup> Mintzberg reports: "The job of managing does not develop reflective planners; rather it breeds adaptive information manipulators who prefer a stimulus-response milieu."<sup>18</sup> Peters and Waterman conclude that managers of excellent companies have "a bias for action."<sup>19</sup> The literary style is quite different, but the two descriptions of what managers do are quite similar.

The concept of MBWA is also important for its prescriptive value. It tells a manager something he can do to be more successful: Spend time with your customers, your suppliers, and your employees. Find out what they are thinking, what problems they confront, what ideas they have. Praise them; reward them; make them feel wanted, respected, and valued.

The concept of MBWA also implies what managers ought not to do. They should not spend all their time behind their desks. They should not



stand their goal and design their groping to move them toward that goal. For the manager who has "a bias for action," Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., offer the slogan "Ready, Fire, Aim."<sup>11</sup> But that phrase misses the mark. A more accurate sequence for the three words is "Aim, Fire, Ready."

Getting *ready* is not the initial chore. The businesses that Peters and Waterman studied rarely prepared so carefully. Rather, the first task is to decide upon the goal—to take *aim*. The manager has to understand what his target is. Even then, rather than get everything *ready* for a single, big shot, the manager quickly *aims* in the general direction of the target and *fires* off an initial round. Based on what this first shot produces, he then gets his organization *ready* for the next round (perhaps improving the sight, perhaps getting a new gun or a new marksman, perhaps moving into a better position, perhaps even modifying the goal), *aims*, and *fires* again. The slogan should be "Aim, Fire, Ready. Aim, Fire, Ready. Aim, Fire, Ready . . ." Or perhaps just MBGA.

Atkins's leadership team knew its objective. There was no ambiguity about it. They wanted to move welfare recipients from dependency to self-sufficiency. They knew exactly at what they were aiming. But to hit this target, they did not know how to fire the gun—or even which guns to fire, or whether they needed to design completely new guns. Nevertheless, rather than get completely ready before firing, they shot off year one's ET. When they saw where that first shot went, they got a little more ready and shot off another program for year two. Indeed, even after four years, the leadership team made it clear to the field that it did not know precisely how year five's ET would work. Still, they were prepared to learn from the experience and then fire off year six's program.

### Management by Wandering Around

One of the most important contributions that Peters and Waterman have made to the literature on management is the concept of "Management by Wandering Around."<sup>12</sup> "MBWA" was derived from observations of how managers in successful companies behave. Peters and Waterman adopted a simple research design. They selected a number of U.S. firms for their superior financial performance and record of innovation; then they sent the McKinsey research team out to interview and observe the forty-three companies that they defined as "excellent."<sup>13</sup> The result, their book *In Search of Excellence*, with its emphasis on corporate culture and the leadership's values (rather than on management information systems



### The Value of MBWA

All of this, of course, sounds so obvious—so obvious that it could not possibly be dignified with some academic-sounding phrase. Yet management by wandering around is an important concept precisely because it captures an obvious idea: managers can learn a lot and motivate a lot just by wandering around. And yet, given the actual behavior of many managers, it is clear that the idea is not all that obvious.

Paying attention to the obvious is important. And capturing an obvious and helpful concept in a catchy four-word phrase is valuable indeed. Most management concepts (no matter how fancy their window dressing) are simple. And, to have any impact, these simple management ideas must be expressible in some pithy phrase. Peters and Waterman were not the first to say that managers wander around a lot. But the wandering that others describe is more abstract and conceptual, less vivid and physical. MBWA is important because it is clever in its wording and compelling in its symbolism. These four words are a contribution because they capture not just one but an entire collection of important managerial ideas.

Moreover, MBWA debunks a durable managerial myth. Our stereotype of the manager is reflected in the cartoons in *The New Yorker*. Sitting in a big room behind his large and empty desk wearing his coat, the manager pushes a button and demands: "Ms. Jones. Send me some decisions to make." Peters and Waterman, however, implicitly argue that good managers do not and should not sit waiting for people to come to them. Excellent managers get out from behind their desks. They wander off to talk with people—lots of people. They search out customers. They wander to where their employees work. They visit their suppliers.<sup>22</sup>

In government, management by wandering around does not have the same reputation that Peters and Waterman gave it in business. When a government manager visits a district office, a journalist is apt to call it a "junket." Travel funds are frequently cut because travel is considered a nonessential activity. When senators and representatives return to their districts to learn what their "customers" are thinking, they are criticized for goofing off. House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill took to calling congressional recesses "district work days," but that only gave journalists more opportunities to poke fun. Perhaps O'Neill should have called the recesses management by wandering around.

It is possible to go through the motions of wandering around without realizing the benefits of the process. There is no value in the wandering

spend all their time reading and dictating memos. They should not spend all their time in meetings with their immediate staff and direct subordinates. Managers need to get information more personally and directly from the people most affected by their decisions. They need to convey their ideas personally and directly to the people upon whom their organization is most dependent.

Mintzberg's work was primarily descriptive, though he did offer some prescriptions. The major purpose of Peters and Waterman was prescriptive, though their prescriptions were derived from their descriptions of what managers in their "excellent" companies did. These somewhat different perspectives appear to lead to somewhat different conclusions. Mintzberg's five chief executives spent 59 percent of their time in scheduled meetings, 22 percent on desk work, 10 percent in unscheduled meetings, 6 percent on telephone calls, and 3 percent on tours. One of Mintzberg's "propositions about managerial work characteristics" is: "Tours provide the manager with the opportunity to observe activity informally without prearrangement. But the manager spends little of his time in open-ended touring."<sup>20</sup> Peters and Waterman would be quick to argue that Mintzberg's five managers do not wander around enough, and Mintzberg, in fact, reached a similar conclusion: "The surprising feature about this powerful tool [the tour] is that it was used so infrequently."<sup>21</sup>

As a prescription, management by wandering around is not meant to be taken literally. The manager is not supposed to open the dictionary and discover that the first definition of the verb "to wander" is "to move or go about aimlessly." Nor did Peters and Waterman recommend a militaristically rigorous regime—between 1:30 and 3:15 each day the manager should wander—although they do believe that the wandering should be conscious, purposeful, and organized.

Peters and Waterman did not discover that 41.5 percent of the variability in business productivity can be explained by wandering around. Rather, the prescriptive value of management by wandering around lies in the host of managerial concepts captured and implied by the phrase. MBWA means that managers need to know what their people—customers, employees, and vendors—are doing and thinking. Peters and Waterman found that their excellent companies were "close to the customer," and that MBWA is one way to establish and maintain this personal rapport. MBWA means that managers should treat people as humans—that they should go out of their way to listen to them and to praise them. Management by wandering around suggests that the people are more important than the numbers.



in determining, *a priori*, which of several good ideas will work best<sup>23</sup> (though analysis can be helpful, *a posteriori*, in sorting out which did).

The concept of MBGA is also important for its prescriptive value. It tells managers something they can do to be more successful: Establish a goal and some intermediate targets. Then get some ideas and try them out. Some will work and some won't. See which ideas move you toward your goals. You will never know which ones are productive until you experiment with them.

MBGA also implies what managers ought not to do: Don't spend all your time attempting to plot out your exact course. You can never possibly get it right. In fact, you can be sure that, no matter how carefully you plan, things will not work out as you think. Murphy lurks everywhere.<sup>24</sup>

As a prescription, management by groping along is not meant to be taken literally; managers are not supposed to "search about blindly." MBGA means that managers need a clear sense of their objectives, but will necessarily be in the dark about how to get there. MBGA means that managers have to try lots of different approaches—indeed, that the only way that they will learn how to realize their objectives is through much experimentation. Moreover, MBGA means that managers—especially successful managers—will make mistakes. Groping means taking risks. Groping means making mistakes.

### Groping Along and the Myth of Managerial Prescience

MBGA directly contradicts another stereotype of management. The stereotypical manager (now at his club) who confesses that he is just groping along is the butt of the jokes from his more confident, all-knowing colleagues. "The rewriting of corporate history," which Rosabeth Moss Kanter, of the Harvard Business School, argues "is often part of the innovation-and-change process," can mean that "accidents, uncertainties, and muddle-headed confusions disappear into clear-sighted strategies."<sup>25</sup> Managers are not supposed to grope along, but they do.

When any management story is told, the emphasis is on premeditated and purposeful action rather than on groping.<sup>26</sup> The manager hardly wants to portray himself as merely having stumbled onto success. Observed Nietzsche, "No victor believes in chance."<sup>27</sup> And yet, writes Kanter, "There is a long philosophic tradition arguing that action precedes thought; a 'reconstructed logic' helps us make sense out of events, and they always sound more strategic and less accidental or fortuitous later."<sup>28</sup> The historian may serve as a co-conspirator in the manager's effort to redefine stumbling as strategy. Many chroniclers, whether jour-

itself. Wandering around is important only because it is a good way to accomplish other, real objectives. Among other things, MBWA helps provide the feedback necessary for MBGA.

A manager can try to obtain such feedback in other ways. Often a top manager will hold a series of luncheon meetings with lower-level employees in a special dining room. The purpose, to give the manager an opportunity to hear what the employees are thinking, is laudable. But the environment is all wrong. The setting reinforces the differential in status and hardly conveys a desire for give and take between equals. The manager has not wandered anywhere. He has summoned the flunkies to his turf. The phrase "management by wandering around" is not at all subtle on this point: the benefits come from the manager's wandering off to visit customers, employees, and suppliers, not by making them come to him.

The concept of management by wandering around is important for one more reason. It gives managers who are already wandering around (but who are not sure that they should be doing so) a license to keep doing it. Neither the cartoons in *The New Yorker* nor the traditional management literature has suggested that managers *ought* to wander around a lot. Managers do strategic planning. They develop information systems. But wander? MBWA is important because it has helped some managers be more analytical and purposeful about what they already did naturally.

### The Value of MBGA

Not only do managers wander. They also grope. "MBGA" does not offer, any more than does MBWA, a new theory of organizational behavior or settle a fundamental debate about management. Neither can the importance of MBGA be ascertained by applying the standard procedures of social science. Nevertheless, the idea of management by groping along is a powerful idea, both descriptively and prescriptively.

The concept of management by groping along has descriptive value. It explains what managers of large, successful organizations do with much of their time. While they are wandering around, they are also groping along. Good managers have a good sense of where they are going—or at least of where they are trying to go. They are constantly looking for ideas about how to get there. They know that they have no monopoly on good ideas about how to accomplish their purposes. Thus, given their bias for action, they spend less time analyzing these ideas than experimenting with them. Analysis as well as intuition can be very helpful in eliminating ideas that are way off target. Neither, however, is very helpful



concept. It suggests that we know where we are going and that we have a clear notion of how we are going to get there.

The strategic-planning approach to management is an effort to make management more systematic—more scientific. Borrowing from the concept of dynamic programming,<sup>30</sup> strategic planners work backwards from where they want their organization to be at some time in the future to where it is now; the objective is to develop a policy, an “optimal path,” that tells the manager how to get from here to there. Implicit in this thinking is the belief that the manager can determine such an optimal path from an analysis of the organization’s resources and capabilities and its political, cultural, and economic environment. Having developed the strategic plan, the manager can follow it to get precisely where he wants to be.

Ironically, while business is becoming disenchanted with strategic planning, government is becoming mesmerized by it. “Strategic planning, as practiced by most American companies, is not working very well,” writes Robert H. Hayes of the Harvard Business School. This, he argues, is because American companies have a “‘strategic leap’ mentality” rather than one that seeks “continual incremental improvements.” Comparing international business competition to guerrilla warfare that is taking place in “a swamp whose topography is constantly changing,” Hayes described American business as “a bunch of hares trained in conventional warfare and equipped with road maps [strategic plans]” while the Japanese and Germans are “a bunch of tortoises that are expert in guerrilla tactics and armed with compasses.”<sup>31</sup>

Hayes’s metaphor of a swamp dramatizes (in a way that my metaphor of climbing a mountain does not) that the political, economic, and social environment of both a business firm and a government agency is constantly changing. But the metaphor of guerrilla warfare is not quite right for government. A business firm is, indeed, trying to defeat its competitors—to win a bigger market share. A government agency is trying to achieve public purposes. Although the political rhetoric emphasizes climbing mountains (e.g., the “strategic leap” of eradicating poverty), the real goals are more modest (finding jobs for some welfare recipients). A better metaphor for government management might be climbing sand dunes. The topography is changing constantly, and the footing never very sure. The objective is not to defeat others at guerrilla warfare but to scale some modest but still significant heights.

As governor of New Hampshire, John Sununu argued that it is difficult, impossible, and, in fact, a mistake to develop a comprehensive plan for the future: “You can think you know more about the system than you



nalists or scholars, look for interesting lessons—lessons that can be found in the manager's intelligent and flawless (or misguided and inept) forecasts, decisions, and actions. How can there be a story if all the manager did was grope along?

In government, there is an additional reason why a manager will not admit to groping along. To convince all those who control the numerous checks and balances involved in authorizing a new policy, the public manager has to oversell the idea as very, very good. But if the idea is so good, why should we merely experiment with it? How can we deny anyone the benefits of this wonderful new idea? Thus we enact legislation or adopt regulations to ensure that the policy applies to everyone. Tomorrow. If having some "model cities" in a few urban areas is a good idea, every city ought to be a "model city."

The Legislator's Conceit is that the idea itself—the policy—is all that matters. Implementation is a mere detail. If the legislature gets the idea right, the tasks of motivating people, designing systems, and building capabilities will be trivial. But the bargaining inherent in the legislative process (to say nothing of the absence of human prescience) ensures that the policy never comes out "right." The legislation is full of ambiguities, contradictions, and unknowns. Often it will be unclear which summit the manager is supposed to climb—or whether he is supposed to dam the valley instead. Yet given the durability of the delusion that we can separate management from policy, few recognize the need for the manager to grope along. The political dynamics of initiating policy ideas is biased against such experimentation.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of management by groping along, like that of wandering around, is important for one more reason. It too gives managers who sense that they are really just groping along a license to keep on groping. Neither the management literature nor cartoons in *The New Yorker* suggest that managers *ought* to grope along. Managers develop strategic plans. Why? Because they will work. Why else? Who ever heard of a manager who just groped along? MBGA is important because it can help some managers be more analytical, purposeful, and unashamed about what they already do naturally.

### Groping Along versus Strategic Planning

Management by groping along sounds so idiosyncratic. —The concept runs counter to our evaluation of our own intellectual abilities—contradicting our desire to plan carefully for the future and degrading our yearning to be rational. Strategic planning is a much more attractive



might attempt to build a fortress; the following month, because a scout discovered an enemy outpost, they might decide to attack it. With no real sense of purpose, they bargain (fight?) with each other for this month's policy.

In contrast, those managers who are groping along—not groping *around*, but groping *along*—not only possess a good compass. They also know in which azimuth they are headed. Along the way, they may learn some things about swamps in general, about this particular swamp, about the technology of bateaus, about the ecology of quagmires, and about the principles of navigation. The manager may be groping along, but he has no trouble specifying the utility of his new knowledge: it is valuable if it helps him get where he and his organization are going. Such knowledge may also be valuable in helping the manager to modify his azimuth—to clarify what his objectives should be.

Lindblom's "muddling through" concerns public policy-making—the formulation of policies by analysts and the bargaining over policies by interests. "Groping along" focuses on public management—the leadership of government agencies by their top managers.<sup>35</sup> Lindblom is concerned with how a lost patrol in the desert selects the routes it will consider taking, compares the prospects and pitfalls of these different routes, and bargains to decide which one it will try first. I am concerned with how the captain leads this lost patrol back to its fortress.

Indeed, both strategic planning and muddling through are more concerned with policy-making than management. Both emphasize the choice of a policy rather than the management of one; they seem to imply that once the correct policy is established—either through analysis and strategic planning or through bargaining and muddling through—the management of this policy is a relatively trivial exercise. The tasks of mobilizing resources, motivating people, modifying goals, and building organizational capacity are not addressed.

The *policy* of ET CHOICES was established through a process that could well be described as muddling through. In fact, Lindblom's approach of "successive-limited comparisons" describes well how the policy of ET CHOICES was developed. Goals were not chosen first and then alternatives analyzed to see which one best achieved those goals; rather the complete package of placement ends and of training and job-search means was developed simultaneously. Analysis of the policy and its alternatives was drastically limited; there was neither the time nor the resources to examine all the possibilities. Yet the final policy was acceptable to liberal advocates for the welfare recipients, to Governor Michael S. Dukakis (who often took liberal positions on social policy but conserva-



really do." Further, Sununu argued, long-range planning creates "long-range commitments" that possess "tremendous inertia, sometimes, in allocating resources." Drawing upon his engineering training, Sununu used the concept of feedback in a simple control system<sup>32</sup> to illustrate the kind of policy mechanism he thought worked best: "It's a little like being in the shower. It gets a little too hot, you turn the cold water on. It gets a little too cold, you turn the hot water on. [You do that] instead of trying to design a system that with one setting of the dials would always deliver exactly the right temperature; that is a very difficult task." Sununu applied this concept to public management: "What you may want to do is create a mechanism that is lean and dynamic and responsive as you go along in order to accommodate the response of the system to changes and inputs that you have either no control over or, in fact, can't identify . . . You develop a system that allows you to respond to changing environments, changing needs and changing times. You cannot lay out, today, the script. But you can build the mechanism that is able to adapt, and respond, and reform, and allocate resources, and focus energies. That's all you can do."<sup>33</sup> That is, public managers need to design systems that permit them to manage by groping along.

### **Groping Along and Muddling Through**

In his classic article "The Science of Muddling Through," Charles E. Lindblom of Yale University argues that, both descriptively and prescriptively, "the method of successive limited comparisons" is superior to "the rational-comprehensive method."<sup>34</sup> True strategic planning is impossible, he writes, because the necessary "means-ends analysis" cannot be done. Lindblom argues that the "limits of human intellectual capacities and on available information set definite limits to man's capacity to be comprehensive." Thus "every administrator," he continues, "must find ways drastically to simplify." To do this, the administrator relies upon a "comparative analysis of incremental changes."

Such an approach is also necessary because administrators are "unable to formulate the relevant values first and then choose among policies to achieve them." Consequently, "one chooses among values and among policies at one and the same time." Public policies are selected, Lindblom emphasizes, not by comprehensive analysis but through bargaining among differing interests and different philosophical perspectives.

In Hayes's swamp of business competition, those who are muddling through would appear to have no compass or even any real objective. This month they might be trying to stave off an attack; next month, they



adaptation—because they had a very specific social vision for their agency. They wanted to convert welfare recipients into productive citizens. They wanted to be running what Atkins called “one of the most successful employment programs in the country.”<sup>37</sup>

A business executive can have a vision too—indeed, possessing a vision is a characteristic of many successful firms.<sup>38</sup> But because it is not constrained to be in a particular line of business, a firm can quickly switch its product lines—and its vision. It can move from buggy whips to brake pads. The R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company can diversify into RJR Industries, and then swallow Nabisco Brands to become RJR/Nabisco. The firm did not have to live or die with cigarette consumption; it could become a diversified food-products company. Indeed, Hayes argues that a business should start not by establishing ends but by creating means: “a company should begin by investing in the development of its capabilities along a broad front . . . as these capabilities develop and as technological and market opportunities appear, the company should encourage managers well down in the organization to exploit matches wherever they occur . . . Top management’s job, then, is to facilitate this kind of entrepreneurial activity . . . Do not develop plans and then seek capabilities; instead, build capabilities and then encourage the development of plans for exploiting them.”<sup>39</sup> For a firm concerned with its survival, encouraging the creative and entrepreneurial use of its existing capabilities makes perfect sense.

For a government agency, however, this kind of entrepreneurship (deriving strategy from capabilities) has limitations. Atkins could take his department into the “jobs business” not only because no one else in Massachusetts was in the business of finding jobs for welfare recipients but also because this activity fit within the overall public mission of his organization. But as commissioner of public welfare, he could not take on the mission of cleaning up pollution in Boston Harbor or acquire the city of Springfield. He could not even seize the opportunity created by his newly acquired job-training and job-placement capabilities to provide these services to welfare recipients in Rhode Island or even to the general public in Massachusetts.

Because Atkins, Glynn, Burke-Tatum, and Pillsbury were groping toward very specific policy objectives, their processes of adaptation differed from those for business.<sup>40</sup> They were not just adapting their organization to changes in its environment. Nor were they merely anticipating environmental changes, prospecting continuously for new market opportunities, or attempting to shape their environment and forcing their competi-

tive ones on fiscal issues), and to the conservatives in the Reagan administration's Department of Health and Human Services.

The history of ET can be divided into policy and management phases. First, a policy that would establish both the ends and the means of ET had to be developed. Through a process of muddling through quickly, this phase was done in less than four months. Then, an organization that would use the available means to achieve the stated ends of ET had to be led and managed. Through a process of management by groping along, this phase went on for over five years.

### **Survival, Purpose, and Adaptation**

MBGA is a sequential process of adaptation in pursuit of a goal. The manager tries some approaches, achieves some successes, adapts the more successful approaches, and continues to pursue his goal.

Scholars of business management have written profusely on adaptation as strategy.<sup>36</sup> Their emphasis, however, is on coping with the external environment to ensure survival. If the organization is a business firm, it makes sense to emphasize the managerial goal of survival. It makes empirical sense: the firm's manager is, in fact, attempting to ensure the continued survival of the firm. This is in the interest of not only the top executive but also the stockholders and the company's other employees (unless the situation has become so disastrous that survival requires firing half of them). In addition, the survival of the firm is socially useful. Assuming that the firm is not imposing too many of its own costs on its physical or social environment, the continued existence of the firm in a free market is (by definition, according to the values of economics) good for society. People are freely paying for the goods or services that the firm produces, a process that itself establishes the value of the firm's efforts. Thus, as long as the firm is willing to play by the rules that society establishes for the marketplace, we want it to strive for survival.

For government agencies, however, the objective should be different. Many public agencies are created precisely because the market cannot provide its services efficiently (e.g., national defense) or because there exists no such market at all (e.g., for welfare). For such government agencies mere survival is not good enough. Indeed, the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare could have continued for decades to determine eligibility and process checks, and Atkins, Glynn, Burke-Tatum, and Pillsbury were not motivated by the need to ensure their agency's survival. Rather, they practiced MBGA—their management strategy of



relatively simple. The truly difficult task—the one that may best distinguish between good and poor managers—is the ability to read the ambiguous results of any particular undertaking, to recognize when an initial guess is wrong, and to terminate, curtail, or modify the undertaking before it consumes too many resources. Even good managers may start out groping in the wrong direction. They may not make fewer mistakes, but they do recognize a mistake more quickly and act appropriately to prevent it from becoming a calamity.

### Engineers and Laws: Managers and Principles

An engineer's professional repertoire contains thousands of physical laws:  $F = m \times a$ ,  $E = m \times C^2$ ,  $E = I \times R$ .<sup>42</sup> The engineer knows all the major laws, and remembers enough about the minor ones to know how to look them up. Which physical laws the engineer employs depends upon the particular problem he faces. All of the laws are correct. The task is to determine which ones are relevant and how they can be applied to the problem at hand. Thus the engineer's repertoire contains not just the equations for these laws but also an understanding of how and under what circumstances each law is useful. At the beginning, an engineer never knows precisely how he will solve a particular problem. He can make some guesses derived from his engineering repertoire. But he does not know for sure. So he experiments with different approaches to see how the physical laws he knows work in this current situation. The engineer must grope along.

The same is true for management. Like the engineer, the manager has a large professional repertoire.<sup>43</sup> There are thousands of managerial principles:

- "Stick to the Knitting."<sup>44</sup>
- "The degree to which the opportunity to use power effectively is granted to or withheld from individuals is one operative difference between those companies which stagnate and those which innovate."<sup>45</sup>
- "Giving people a role in shaping decisions secures their commitment."<sup>46</sup>
- "Influence adheres to those who sense what it is made of."<sup>47</sup>

As with the laws of physics, these rules are both prescriptive and descriptive.  $F = m \times a$  not only describes the relationship between force, mass, and acceleration; it also prescribes how many newtons of force you need to apply to accelerate a body with a mass of 50 kilograms at the rate of 50 meters per second squared. Similarly, "stick to the knitting" describes

tors to respond. They were interested in more than survival. They had a very specific mission for their organization, and they were aggressively groping their way toward it.

### Luck and the Manager's Repertoire

Of course, the reason organizations survive or goals are achieved may have nothing to do with brilliant strategic planning, or effective bargaining among interests, or intelligent groping along. It may simply be dumb luck. The success of some public managers in achieving public purposes may be largely a matter of luck.

Atkins did not start off groping, however, because he knew nothing about management or nothing about employment and training. He had held numerous managerial positions in business and government (including several in the employment and training field), and he had studied public management. Yet rather than using this knowledge to develop a multiyear strategic plan, he started off groping along. He recognized that he knew little about his new agency, about welfare recipients, and about the Massachusetts political environment of 1983. Moreover, he understood that no strategic plan—no matter how brilliant—would bring along his senior staff, middle managers, and line workers. They all had to grope along together, while Atkins motivated them with a series of small wins.

But Atkins did have a large managerial repertoire—much of it developed during his years with Chase: establish goals, measure results, and reward performance; report frequently to your political superiors on your activities and accomplishments; keep on top of every major project in your agency.<sup>41</sup> Atkins used his entire repertoire. He was groping along, but he was not doing it blindly. He knew where he wanted to go and had some good ideas about how to get there.

At any one time, a good manager is groping in a number of different directions. The better managers—those with the largest and most applicable repertoires—may begin groping in better directions. But they are still groping. They do not know precisely how to proceed, though experience and study makes them better at selecting initial directions.

But a more important distinction between good and bad managers may be how quickly they learn from their groping. Managers with larger and more diverse repertoires may be better at recognizing critical patterns and specific lessons (just as a general with more battlefield experience will be better at understanding the flow of the battle, coping with exigencies, and recognizing opportunities). Moreover, recognizing a success is



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## Managing and Evaluating Social Programs

During the 1960s and 1970s, the United States conducted a series of "social experiments" to determine what would happen if the nation's welfare system was replaced with a negative income tax. In a 1987 analysis of these experiments, Alicia H. Munnell, vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, emphasized that one "lesson" to emerge was "the merits of random assignment." This lesson, she argued, would become

important if Congress endorses the [Reagan] Administration's proposal to embark on a series of state experiments in welfare reform. If these experiments are to help in improving the welfare system, they must assign participants randomly to control and treatment groups. Only this approach avoids self-selection bias, a phenomenon for which no statistical method can compensate. Nowhere are the difficulties of evaluating programs without random assignment more apparent than in Massachusetts. Encouraging results have been claimed for the state's Employment and Training (ET) Choices program, but the lack of a control group makes it impossible to separate the effects of the training program from the impact of an economy operating with very low levels of unemployment.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare was frequently criticized for failing to evaluate ET CHOICES with a policy experiment that included the random assignment of some welfare recipients to a treatment group that received ET services and other recipients to a control group that received no such services.

what "excellent" companies do, and prescribes how to become an excellent company.

Unfortunately, the manager must cope with two complications that the engineer does not have. First, the principles of management are less precise. "Stick to the knitting" leaves ambiguous precisely what each firm's (or agency's) knitting is. The mass and acceleration of a physical body are very well defined. The knitting of a firm is not. Second, with the singular exception of the first nanosecond of the Big Bang, the laws of physics apply everywhere and at all times. In contrast, as Herbert A. Simon of Carnegie-Mellon University observes, the principles of management are often contradictory.<sup>48</sup> Peters and Waterman advocate "simple form, lean staff."<sup>49</sup> But Kanter demurs: "to produce innovation, more complexity is essential; more relationships, more sources of information, more angles on the problem, more ways to pull in human and material resources, more freedom to walk around and across the organization."<sup>50</sup>

So how does the manager make use of the various principles in his managerial repertoire? Is "stick to the knitting" the principle that most applies in this situation? How narrowly should a firm's knitting be defined? And is there some other managerial principle—such as "be alert to new opportunities"—that points in a contradictory direction?

Which principles the manager applies depends upon the particular problem he faces. All of the management principles are correct. Some are applicable in some situations; some in others. The manager's task is to determine which ones are relevant, and how they can be adapted to attack the problem at hand. At the beginning, a manager never knows precisely how he will solve a particular problem. He has some ideas—based on the thousands of managerial principles in his repertoire. But he does not know for sure. So he experiments to see how the principles he knows work in the current situation. Like Atkins, Glynn, Burke-Tatum, and Pillsbury, any manager must grope along.



- 1983); Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, *A Passion for Excellence* (New York: Random House, 1985).
15. Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 31.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
  17. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, p. 124.
  18. Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, p. 5.
  19. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, pp. 13–14 and chap. 5.
  20. Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, pp. 39 and 52.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  22. For those whose scholarly sensibilities are offended by references to cartoons in *The New Yorker*, let me offer another source for this stereotype of the manager. John P. Kotter, *The General Managers* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), p. 131: "The professional manager in America exists above the industrial din, away from the dirt, noise, and irrationality of people and products. He dresses well. His secretary is alert and helpful. His office is as clean, quiet, and subdued as that of any other professional. He plans, organizes, and controls large enterprises in a calm, logical, dispassionate, and decisive manner. He surveys computer printouts, calculates profits and losses, sells and acquires subsidiaries, and imposes systems for monitoring and motivating employees, applying a general body of rules to each special circumstance." If you don't believe it, you can look it up—in *The New Yorker*.
  23. Behn's Fifth Law of Policy Analysis: Analysis is much more helpful in exposing poor options than in identifying an optimal option.
  24. Robert D. Behn, "Why Murphy Was Right," *Policy Analysis*, 6 (Summer 1980), pp. 361–363.
  25. Kanter, *The Change Masters*, pp. 284–286.
  26. Writes Weick in "Small Wins," p. 43: "A series of small wins can be gathered into a retrospective summary that imputes a consistent line of development, but this post hoc construction should not be mistaken for orderly implementation."
  27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 258.
  28. Kanter, *The Change Masters*, p. 286.
  29. Fortunately, our federal system gives us fifty state governments and thousands of municipal governments, each of whose certain prediction of how its perfect plan will work differs significantly from the equally certain prediction in the next jurisdiction. Individually each government can pretend that it knows exactly where it is going, while collectively we all continue to grope along.
  30. Eric V. Denardo, *Dynamic Programming* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982).
  31. Robert H. Hayes, "Why Strategic Planning Goes Awry," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1986.
  32. In the terminology of control theory, management by groping along is a closed-loop control system; the feedback loop provides information that is used to correct deviations from the desired path. In contrast, comprehensive

20. Eileen McNamara, "Welfare snag leaves mother, girl homeless," *The Boston Globe*, May 13, 1983.
21. Eileen McNamara, "Welfare counsel fired by Atkins," *The Boston Globe*, May 14, 1983.
22. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, pp. 241, 58, and 84.
23. Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, *A Passion for Excellence* (New York: Random House, 1985), pp. 252 and 260.
24. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, pp. 157, 186, and 321.

## 7. Management by Groping Along

1. Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation, *An Evaluation of the Massachusetts Employment and Training Choices Program: Interim Findings on Participation and Outcomes, FY84-FY85* (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, January 1986), p. 26.
2. Meredith and Associates, Inc., "Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare Employment and Training Program," August 1983.
3. Martin A. Levin and Barbara Ferman, *The Political Hand* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), pp. 14-15.
4. Kenneth R. Andrews, *The Concept of Corporate Strategy* (Homewood, Ill.: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1971).
5. Robert D. Behn, "Leadership for Cut-Back Management: The Use of Corporate Strategy," *Public Administration Review*, 40 (November/December 1980), pp. 613-620.
6. For a discussion of getting people to "sign up" for a project rather than ordering them to participate, see Tracy Kidder, *The Soul of a New Machine* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1981), pp. 63-66.
7. Karl E. Weick, "Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems," *American Psychologist*, 39 (January 1984), pp. 43 and 44.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 46 and 43.
9. From a seminar at Duke University on April 2, 1986.
10. Scott M. Matheson with James Edwin Kee, *Out of Balance* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1986), p. 225.
11. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 119 and 155.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. The most obvious deficiency of this research design is the lack of a comparison group. How do Peters and Waterman know that the management of nonexcellent companies is not also characterized by "a bias for action," etc.? For additional criticisms of Peters and Waterman's research design, see Robert T. Golembiewski, "Toward Excellence in Public Management: Constraints on Emulating America's Best-Run Companies," in Robert B. Denhardt and Edward T. Jennings, Jr. (eds.), *The Revitalization of the Public Service* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 1987), pp. 177-198.
14. For example, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *The Change Masters: Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the American Corporation* (New York: Simon and Schuster,



47. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, 1980 edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), p. 89.
48. Herbert A. Simon, "The Proverbs of Administration," *Public Administration Review*, 6 (1946), pp. 53–67.
49. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, chap. 11.
50. Kanter, *The Change Masters*, p. 44.

## 8. Managing and Evaluating Social Programs

1. Alicia H. Munnell, "Lessons from the Income Maintenance Experiments: An Overview," in Munnell (ed.), *Lessons from the Income Maintenance Experiments* (Boston: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 1987), pp. 20–21.
2. For a list of thirty-five such policy experiments, see David H. Greenberg and Philip K. Robins, "The Changing Role of Social Experiments in Policy Analysis," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 5 (Winter 1986), pp. 353–356.
3. For a general discussion of experimental design, see Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).
4. Thomas Francis, Jr., et al., "An Evaluation of the 1954 Poliomyelitis Vaccine Trials," *American Journal of Public Health*, 45 (1955), Table 2b, p. 25.
5. This is the result of two phenomena. The Income Effect suggests that if your income goes up you will work less. The Substitution Effect suggests that if your earnings per hour go down (as a result, in this case, of a tax on those earnings) you will also work less—substituting leisure for work. See any standard microeconomics textbook, for example, Jack Hirshleifer, *Price Theory and Applications* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 100–101 and 386–390.
6. Suppose that without any welfare program, a family works 80 hours a month at a wage of \$3.50 per hour so that its monthly income is \$280. How much would it work under a negative-income-tax system? For example, suppose that without any income this same family is eligible for a welfare check of \$400 per month that is reduced by 50 cents for every dollar earned. Thus if the family earns \$100, it receives a welfare check of \$350 for a total income of \$450. With this negative-income-tax system, would this family still work 80 hours? If it did, it would earn \$280 and receive a welfare check of \$260 for a total monthly income of \$540. Would the family reduce its work effort to 60 hours, for a total monthly income of \$505? Or would it not work at all, and just take the \$400 welfare check?
7. For a general discussion of the negative-income-tax experiments, see Munnell, *Lessons from the Income Maintenance Experiments*; Joseph A. Pechman and P. Michael Timpane, *Work Incentives and Income Guarantees* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1975); Richard P. Nathan, *Social Science in Government* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 49–63.
8. Judith M. Gueron, *Work Initiatives for Welfare Recipients* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, March 1986), p. 1.

planning is an open-loop control system. With no feedback loop, the system (once started) runs completely on dead reckoning.

33. From a meeting of governors, December 12–13, 1985, Stateline, Nevada.
34. Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review*, 19 (Spring 1959), pp. 79–88.
35. "Logical incrementalism," the approach of James Brian Quinn of Dartmouth College, has a number of similarities to Lindblom's "muddling through." *Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism* (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1980). Quinn is concerned primarily with the formulation of strategy for a corporation, though he pays some attention to the implementation of this strategy. Quinn argues that his business executives consider alternatives that are further from the status quo than do Lindblom's public-policy decision makers, and that they "take a much more proactive approach toward change" (p. 100). But compared with Atkins and his staff, Quinn's managers are extremely cautious. Rather than boldly proclaim that they are going to find jobs for welfare recipients, Quinn's business managers prefer to have others suggest what new goals might be, lest they become too publicly identified with new directions that the organization will not accept. See also James Brian Quinn, "Managing Strategies Incrementally," *The International Journal of Management Science*, 10 (1982), pp. 613–627.
36. Herbert A. Simon, Donald W. Smithburg, and Victor A. Thompson, *Public Administration* (New York: Knopf, 1950); Dan E. Schendel and Charles W. Hofer, *Strategic Management: A New View of Business Policy and Planning* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); and Balaji S. Chakravarthy, "Adaptation: A Promising Metaphor for Strategic Management," *Academy of Management Review*, 7 (January 1982), pp. 35–44.
37. Charles M. Atkins, "An Open Letter to All Department Staff," *Public Welfare News*, January 1986, p. 2.
38. Richard T. Pascale and Anthony G. Athos, *The Art of Japanese Management* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).
39. Robert H. Hayes, "Strategic Planning—Forward in Reverse?" *Harvard Business Review*, 63 (November/December 1985), p. 118.
40. R. E. Miles and C. C. Snow, *Organizational Strategy, Structure and Process* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).
41. Charles Atkins, "Comments," *Gordon Chase, 1932–1980* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1981).
42. Herbert A. Simon, "Information Processing Models of Cognition," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 30 (1979), p. 368; R. Bhaskar and Herbert A. Simon, "Problem Solving in Semantically Rich Domains: An Example from Engineering Thermodynamics," *Cognitive Science*, 1 (April 1977), pp. 193–215.
43. Robert D. Behn, "The Nature of Knowledge about Public Management," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 7 (Fall 1987), pp. 200–212.
44. Peters and Waterman, *In Search*, chap. 10.
45. Kanter, *The Change Masters*, p. 18.
46. Herbert Kaufman, *The Administrative Behavior of Federal Bureau Chiefs* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), p. 82.



# *Reinventing Government*

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How the  
Entrepreneurial Spirit  
Is Transforming  
the Public Sector

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David Osborne  
*and*  
Ted Gaebler



A PLUME BOOK

1993





school principal who discovers students wearing beepers to stay in contact with their superiors in the drug trade. In a centralized system, the principal asks the school board to promulgate a regulation about beepers. By the time a decision comes down, six months later, the students are carrying mobile phones—if not guns.

*In today's world, things simply work better if those working in public organizations—schools, public housing developments, parks, training programs—have the authority to make many of their own decisions.*

In the information age, “the pressure for accelerated decision-making slams up hard against the increased complexity and unfamiliarity of the environment about which the decisions must be made,” Alvin Toffler wrote in *Anticipatory Democracy*. The result is “crushing decisional overload—in short, political future shock.” Toffler described two possible responses:

*One way is to attempt to further strengthen the center of government, adding more and yet more politicians, bureaucrats, experts, and computers in the desperate hope of out-running the acceleration of complexity; the other is to begin reducing the decision load by sharing it with more people, allowing more decisions to be made “down below” or at the “periphery” instead of concentrating them at the already stressed and malfunctioning center.*

Traditional leaders instinctively reach for the first alternative. When fiscal crisis erupts, they consolidate agencies and centralize control. When savings and loans fail, they create a superagency in Washington. When drug traffic escalates, they appoint a national drug czar. But this instinct increasingly leads to failure. Centralized controls and consolidated agencies generate *more* waste, not less. The Resolution Trust Corporation falls further and further behind the complexity of the marketplace. Our drug czar watches in impotence as shooting wars between drug gangs erupt in city after city.

Entrepreneurial leaders instinctively reach for the decentralized approach. They move many decisions to “the periphery,”

## Decentralized Government: From Hierarchy to Participation and Teamwork

*There is nothing that can replace the special intelligence that a worker has about the workplace. No matter how smart a boss is or how great a leader, he/she will fail miserably in tapping the potential of employees by working against employees instead of with them.*

—Ronald Contino, former deputy commissioner,  
New York City Sanitation Department

Fifty years ago centralized institutions were indispensable. Information technologies were primitive, communication between different locations was slow, and the public work force was relatively uneducated. We had little alternative but to bring all our public health employees together in one hospital, all our public works employees together in one organization, all our bank regulators together in one or two huge institutions, so information could be gathered and orders dispensed efficiently. There was plenty of time for information to flow up the chain of command and decisions to flow back down.

But today information is virtually limitless, communication between remote locations is instantaneous, many public employees are well educated, and conditions change with blinding speed. There is no time to wait for information to go up the chain of command and decisions to come down. Consider the



usually happen because someone at the top has a good blueprint. Often, it happens because good ideas bubble up from employees who actually do the work and deal with the customers.

*Fourth, decentralized institutions generate higher morale, more commitment, and greater productivity.* When managers entrust employees with important decisions, they signal their respect for those employees. This is particularly important in organizations of knowledge workers. If we are to tap the skills and commitment of development specialists, teachers, and environmental protection officers, we cannot treat them like industrial workers on an assembly line. Employers of all kinds have learned the same thing: to make effective use of knowledge workers, they must give them authority to make decisions. Management fads come and go, as all public employees know. But participation is not a fad; it is all around us, in virtually every industry.

Harlan Cleveland, former dean of the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota, wrote a fascinating book about managing in a knowledge economy called *The Knowledge Executive*. "In the old days when only a few people were well educated and 'in the know,' leadership of the uninformed was likely to be organized in vertical structures of command and control," he said. "Leadership of the informed is different: it results in the necessary action only if exercised mainly by persuasion, bringing into consultation those who are going to have to do something to make the decision work." Authority, in other words, is increasingly "delegated upward." "Collegial not command structures become the more natural basis for organization. Not 'command and control' but 'conferring and networking' become the mandatory modes for getting things done." Cleveland called this "the twilight of hierarchy."

While the rest of society has rushed headlong away from hierarchy—whether through the student movements of the 1960s or the women's movement that began during the 1970s or the entrepreneurial movement of the 1980s—most governments have held tight to the reins. Their message to employees has not changed: Follow orders. Don't use your heads, don't think for yourself, don't take independent action. If something goes



as we have already described—into the hands of customers, communities, and nongovernmental organizations. They push others “down below,” by flattening their hierarchies and giving authority to their employees.

Decentralized institutions have a number of advantages.

*First, they are far more flexible than centralized institutions; they can respond quickly to changing circumstances and customers' needs.* Doug Ross, former director of the Michigan Commerce Department, offers the perfect illustration. “The only way we could serve our businesses in a rapidly changing marketplace was by decentralizing authority,” he told us. “I couldn’t know as much about any of our programs as the people who were out in the field, dealing day in and day out with businesses. If the decisions had to come up the chain of command to me, I had to learn enough to make them, and then they had to go back down, we could never respond quickly enough to the needs of our customers.”

*Second, decentralized institutions are more effective than centralized institutions.* Frontline workers are closest to most problems and opportunities: they know what actually happens, hour by hour and day by day. Often they can craft the best solutions—if they have the support of those who run the organization. This gives participatory organizations a tremendous advantage. Ronald Contino, who used participatory management to turn around the New York City Sanitation Department’s Bureau of Motor Equipment (BME), puts it well: “On the basis of proven experience, I regard the BME worker as our most valuable resource, who has more capability to improve the organization as an entity and solve its problems than barrels of management specialists bearing very profound ideas about what should be done in the workplace. Armed with the employee involvement programs that we have put in place, the worker has an overriding advantage: it is *his/her* workplace.”

*Third, decentralized institutions are far more innovative than centralized institutions.* The policy experts at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government discovered this in their work on the Ford Foundation’s Innovation Awards. Their biggest surprise, they testify, was the discovery that innovation does not



## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO CREECH

Perhaps the starkest example of decentralization we came across occurred in the nation's largest and most centralized bureaucracy: the Department of Defense. According to military historian Martin van Creveld, successful armies have always decentralized authority. But during the 1960s, the U.S. military lost sight of this lesson. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who came to the Pentagon from the helm of the industrial-era Ford Motor Company, was a devotee of centralized systems. Enthralled by the idea of efficiency through centralized control and systems planning, his whiz kids churned out cost-benefit analyses and new regulations faster than the field commanders could follow them. Authority gravitated upward, and those on the field felt their ability to make decisions slip away.

As the military bogged down in Vietnam, the urge to centralize intensified. Ultimately, President Johnson took personal control of the war. He ordered bombing runs and battlefield campaigns from the White House. His people at the Pentagon pored over aerial photos and pinpointed targets 10,000 miles away. Generals at headquarters in Vietnam commanded frontline troops over the radio. And the U.S. military paid the price.

Fortunately, our leaders learned from defeat. When they expelled Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, they used a very different approach. President Bush, who stressed repeatedly that he would not repeat the mistakes of Vietnam, gave General Norman Schwarzkopf only two missions: expel Iraq from Kuwait and destroy the fighting power of Iraq's Republican Guards. He told the military what he wanted done, but he let them figure out how best to do it. General Schwarzkopf took the same attitude with his battlefield commanders.

One of those responsible for this philosophical shift was General W. L. (Bill) Creech—a man who remains a legend within the U.S. Air Force, even in retirement. In 1978, Creech took over the Tactical Air Command (TAC), a \$40 billion, 115,000 person, 3,800 aircraft operation. On any given day, nearly half of its planes could not fly because of mechanical problems. The



wrong that is not strictly your responsibility, ignore it. If you absolutely have to make your own decision, choose safety. Never, ever, take a risk.

This message is enormously destructive. For decades it has cowed public employees, left them docile, passive, and bitter. In traditional, hierarchical organizations, they may complain, but they can barely conceive of taking control into their own hands.

The resulting inertia carries an enormous price tag. "Seeing the waste, some call for *more* centralized controls," says Gifford Pinchot III. "But the waste is not being created by inadequate controls. *It is being created by removing the sense and fact of control from the only people close enough to the problem to do something about it*" (emphasis added).

To return control to those who work down where the rubber meets the road, entrepreneurial leaders pursue a variety of strategies. They use participatory management, to decentralize decision making; they encourage teamwork, to overcome the rigid barriers that separate people in hierarchical institutions; they create institutional "champions," to protect those within the organization who use their new authority to innovate; and they invest in their employees, to ensure that they have the skills and morale to make the most of their new authority. Entrepreneurial leaders also decentralize authority *between* governmental organizations—pushing decisions down from Washington to the states and from state governments to local governments. We will discuss each of these five strategies later in this chapter.

Governments that want to be accountable to their citizens cannot simply turn their employees free, of course. Voters demand some accountability. Hence organizations that decentralize authority also find that they have to articulate their missions, create internal cultures around their core values, and measure results. Accountability for inputs gives way to accountability for outcomes, and authoritarian cultures give way to the kind of "loose-tight" cultures described by Peters and Waterman in *In Search of Excellence*, in which shared values and missions take the place of rules and regulations as the glue that keeps employees moving in the same direction.



name on the aircraft's nose.) He decentralized the supply operation, so spare parts were available right on the flight lines. And he let squadron commanders plan their own sortie schedules.

Creech lavished attention on his repair and supply people, improving their living quarters, investing in their training, and spending his own time giving them briefings. He had every building in the TAC command given a fresh coat of paint, and he invested in carpets and furniture and new barracks—on the theory “that if equipment is shabby looking, it affects your pride in your organization and your performance. . . . You either have a climate of professionalism, or one of deterioration and decay.”

He also publicized results, embraced competition, and allowed squadrons and bases to concentrate on their missions. TAC set clear, measurable goals for each team. Creech encouraged bases to put charts of maintenance, supply, and sortie performance on the walls. Often they put the most vital statistics on big boards out in front of the unit, for the competition to see. TAC began giving out trophies and holding annual awards banquets to honor the best squadrons. “We actively stressed competition,” Creech explained. “We instituted new goals and standards, but at the same time we gave the unit *control* over its own pace and schedules to meet its year-end goals.”

“It was not long before a strong comradery grew up between pilots and their crew chiefs,” according to *Inc.* “And pretty soon one squadron was working overtime to beat the other two squadrons in a wing, on everything from pilot performance to quality of maintenance.”

The results speak for themselves:

- When Creech left TAC, 85 percent of its planes were rated mission capable, up from 58 percent when he arrived; he had taken TAC from the worst to the best of all air force commands.
- Fighter jets were averaging 29 hours a month of flying time, up from 17.
- TAC was capable of launching double the number of sorties it could when Creech arrived.



number of training sorties flown by its pilots had dropped 7.8 percent a year for nearly a decade. Pilots who felt they needed 25 hours of flying time per month to stay combat ready were getting 15 or less. For every 100,000 hours flown, seven planes were crashing—many because of faulty maintenance. Pilots, mechanics, and technicians were leaving TAC in droves. “The U.S. military was coming apart,” Creech later confided. “It was worse than you think.”

Creech had worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense during the mid-1960s, and he had seen McNamara’s passion for centralization and standardization. He decided that passion was TAC’s biggest problem. The air force used “a ‘one size fits all’ approach,” he said in a 1983 speech. “A single maintenance organization was created that was supposed to fit organizations as disparate as [the Military Airlift Command], which does its maintenance on the road, to [the Strategic Air Command], which operates out of its main operating bases for alert, . . . to TAC, which deploys in squadron size packages all over the world. . . . *Everybody does it exactly the same.*”

In addition, everything was centralized: maintenance, parts, planning, scheduling. “Control was at the top.” Every single repair call had to go through the centralized maintenance shop, called Job Control—a process that slowed maintenance down to a crawl. Moving one F-15 part through the supply system, *Inc.* magazine reported, “required 243 entries on 13 forms, involving 22 people and 16 man hours for administration and record keeping.”

Creech decided the cure was radical decentralization. During the days of centralization, the air force had put the mechanics and airplanes in a central pool, separating them from the squadrons—the 24-pilot teams, each with its own name, symbol, and fierce loyalties, that had entered American folklore during World War II. Creech reversed this. He assigned mechanics to squadrons, giving each mechanic the cap and patch of his own squadron—the Buccaneers or the Black Falcons. He assigned airplanes to squadrons, painting the squadron insignia—the same as the pilots and mechanics now wore—on their tails. (He even painted the name of the lead mechanic next to the pilot’s



mands adopted many of his ideas. One of his disciples, General Larry D. Welch, succeeded him at TAC, then took his approach to the Strategic Air Command, and finally wound up as Air Force Chief of Staff. In 1990, a Welch protégé took over the air force's last centralized command, the Military Airlift Command, and began spreading the gospel according to Creech. And in the army, General Vuono's Communities of Excellence program is essentially modeled on what Creech did at Langley Air Force Base, TAC's showplace.

Creech was also instrumental in the success of Bob Stone's Model Installations initiative. When he was recruiting commanders, Stone says, a funny thing happened. "I briefed a bunch of generals, and they all said, very tensely, 'Have you shown this to Creech?' I'd say no. And a couple of them said, 'Well, I'd be interested in seeing what his reaction was.'" Once Creech came on board, 40 other commanders followed.

### DECENTRALIZING PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT

In his six years at TAC, Creech virtually doubled its productivity. He did so simply by recognizing human nature: people work harder and invest more of their creativity when they control their own work. Manufacturing businesses that embrace participatory management say it typically increases their productivity by 30 to 40 percent. Sometimes the increase is far higher. "The extra commitment of the self-motivated doesn't make just a 10 or 20 percent productivity difference," says Pinchot; "someone who is fully engaged in his or her chosen work can do in months what routine attendance to a task might not accomplish in years."

Participatory management is flourishing in entrepreneurial public organizations, from school districts to police departments. Consider the New York City Sanitation Department, a huge, sprawling organization that collects the garbage and sweeps the streets in a city of 7 million. In 1978, when Ronald

- The elapsed time between the order of a part and its delivery had dropped from 90 to 11 minutes.
- The crash rate had dropped from one every 13,000 flying hours to one every 50,000.
- And the reenlistment rate for first-term mechanics had nearly doubled.

*TAC accomplished all of this with no new money, no more people, and a work force with less experience than the work force in place through the years of decline. "What was it primarily?" Creech asked. "We think it was organization. We think it was decentralization. We think it was getting authority down to the lowest level. We think it was acceptance of responsibility to go with that authority. We think it was a new spirit of leadership at many levels—making good things happen."*

In any organization, Creech told *Inc.*, "there are lots of people just waiting for you to give them some responsibility, some sense of ownership, something they can take personal pride in. And it's amazing how, once you take those first steps, suddenly a thousand flowers bloom, and the organization takes off in ways that nobody could have predicted."

Traditional managers assume that if they decentralize authority they will have less control, he added. But the opposite is true.

*When I left TAC, I had more control over it than my predecessors. I'd created leaders and helpers at all those various levels. Without that kind of network below you, you're a leader in name only.*

*It's not really that hard to run a large organization. You just have to think small about how to achieve your goals. There's a very finite limit to how much leadership you can exercise at the very top. You can't micromanage—people resent that. Things are achieved by individuals, by collections of twos and fives and twenties, not collections of 115,000.*

General Creech retired in 1984, but his philosophy spread. While he was still at TAC, both the European and Pacific com-



in solid waste, where waiting time at the Energy Recovery Plant was delaying drivers every afternoon. Management was planning to spend \$1 million to double the size of the tipping floor, where the trucks unloaded. But by charting the traffic flow, the employees figured out that if drivers on the East Side simply started an hour earlier, the early afternoon traffic jam would disappear.

"That would never have happened if management had hired a consultant who said, 'Get the east side guys to start at six in the morning,' " says Tom Mosgaller, TQM coordinator for the city. "We would have had to bargain 'til hell froze over to get that. But because the employees came up with it, they owned it."

Madison has even shown how police departments can use participatory management. In the summer of 1986, Police Chief David Couper called a meeting to discuss the idea of a field laboratory, where the department could test new ideas. Over 50 members of the department showed up. They chose a 10-member planning team, which Mosgaller trained in quality management.

After intense discussions, the team recommended an Experimental Police District, with 38 members and jurisdiction over an area of 30,000 people. They interviewed all department employees to find out their concerns, then incorporated them into the management structure of the new district. This was the revolutionary step: *The employees elected their own captain and lieutenants. They developed their own staffing and work schedules. They designed and built their own district building.*

The Experimental Police District also surveyed its customers and adopted community-oriented policing (see chapter 2). To help carry out the community approach, detectives, officers, meter monitors, and clerical workers began meeting in teams. Cooperation between them increased dramatically. "They used to be stratified," says Mosgaller:

*The great thing is what's happened to the meter monitors. We never used the meter monitors as the eyes and ears of the police force. They were just out there writing tickets. But they see things every day. And now they know what the*



Contino was hired to manage the department's Bureau of Motor Equipment, it was a shambles. With more than 1,300 mechanics, welders, electricians, blacksmiths, and machinists, it was responsible for maintaining all Sanitation Department vehicles. Yet on any given day, it could keep only half of the city's 6,500 garbage trucks and street sweepers in operation.

Contino tapped the ideas of his employees through a top-level labor committee and a series of labor-management committees. Within three years, 85 percent of the garbage trucks were back in operation, and departmental innovations had saved more than \$16 million. "This was possible because an environment had been created where each individual knew that he was being represented in the decision-making process, and that he had a direct 'pipeline to the top' to voice his very own concerns and desires," Contino says. "Changes in procedures were no longer viewed as orders generated by a distant elite, but rather as a product of teamwork and a universal desire to see the job improve."

Once the department was back on solid footing, Contino began handing day-to-day control over operations to line employees. He put a machinist in charge of his new Special Projects Division, which handled all new equipment orders. He had auto mechanics help write all specifications for new orders, test all new equipment when it first arrived, and staff the unit that negotiated and enforced warranties. He created a Research and Development Group, composed entirely of auto mechanics, which has implemented at least 50 design improvements and licensed several to private companies, earning royalties for the city. An employee team even developed a new refuse wagon, a monstrous vehicle used to carry garbage from a wharf to a landfill. They call it "Our Baby."

Madison, Wisconsin, embraced participatory management as part of its Total Quality Management effort. (One of Deming's fundamental principles is employee involvement in decision making.) Madison's first quality team, in the Motor Equipment Division, saved \$700,000 a year by creating a preventive maintenance program and reducing average vehicle downtime from nine days to three. Another employee group studied problems



tions, and turned each school over to an elected council of parents, teachers, and community members.

### **Labor-Management Cooperation**

Many public managers believe that unions are the greatest obstacle standing in the way of entrepreneurial government. Certainly unions resist changes that threaten their members' jobs—as any rational organization would. But most entrepreneurial managers tell us that unions have not been their primary obstacle. The real issue, they believe, is the quality of management. "Labor-management problems are simply a symptom of bad management," says John Cleveland, who ran the Michigan Modernization Service. "The issue in all organizations is the quality of the top managers. And traditionally, in political environments, the top appointees have no management experience. They don't stay around very long, and they don't pay much attention to management."

When the consulting firm Coopers & Lybrand conducted its Survey on Public Entrepreneurship, it found that local government executives said "governmental regulations," "institutional opposition," and "political opposition" were the greatest barriers to productivity improvements. "Organized labor opposition" ranked fourth out of six choices.

The rank and file are "anxious to help make changes," says Rob McGarrah of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). They understand what a poor job many public institutions do. If change means losing pay or giving up collective bargaining, they're not interested. "But if it's a question of new opportunities, our people are hungry for new opportunities."

Public sector unions are in much the same position their private sector counterparts were in when foreign competition decimated so many American industries. They can resist change—and watch their industry decline. Or they can work with management to restructure their organizations and regain the trust of their customers—the taxpaying public.



*detectives are looking for, so they can help. They're our best information source—and they feel empowered.*

Today the Experimental Police District is an enthusiastic, motivated organization. Absenteeism and workers' compensation claims have fallen sharply. In an employee survey taken during the district's second year, more than 80 percent reported higher job satisfaction than in their previous assignment, and more than 60 percent believed they were more effective in solving crimes. The top five reasons they gave for choosing to work in the district were "a more supportive management style," a "less rigid structure," "greater input to decision-making," "more autonomy," and "a team atmosphere." The department was so pleased with the results that in 1991 it created three more decentralized districts, to cover the rest of the city. "I think we've learned that effective working teams are 30 to 40 people," says Couper.

Participatory management is even spreading in public education. Traditionally, public school systems have been horribly centralized. (Before its recent decentralization, Chicago had 500,000 public school students and 3,000 administrators; Chicago's Catholic school system, with 250,000 students, had 36 administrators.) Yet study after study has proven that schools in which principals and teachers have significant authority are more successful than those in which the important decisions are made by a central administration. So hundreds of school districts have begun to practice what educators call site management—pushing "decision-making authority down as much as possible to the school level," as Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton describes it, to "give the principals more authority [and] give the teachers more authority."

Dade County, Florida, which encompasses Miami, has given authority over most of its schools to teams of principals, teachers, and, sometimes, parents. In Dade County and in Rochester, New York, each school now has a mission-driven budget. In Chicago's first year of reform, it shifted \$40 million from central administration to the schools, cut 640 administration posi-



No one wants to innovate themselves out of a job. But when employees know they have job security, their attitude toward innovation changes dramatically. In Phoenix, several employees have even recommended that their positions be eliminated. Since Phoenix employees get to keep 10 percent of the first-year savings they generate through the city's suggestion program, these employees have not only moved to new jobs, but earned sizable bonuses in the process.

### **Flattening the Organizational Hierarchy**

The most serious resistance to teamwork and participatory management often comes from middle managers, not unions. If employees are making decisions and solving problems, middle managers become superfluous. Too often they stand in the way of action, because their instinct, to justify their existence, is to intervene. As Peters and Waterman put it, middle management acts as a sponge. It stops ideas on their way down and stops ideas on their way up.

With today's computerized systems, managers also have so much information at their fingertips that they can supervise far more people than they once could. Their span of control is broader. If organizations keep all their layers of management—and all the middle managers continue to play their traditional roles—overcontrol quickly sets in. Hence participatory organizations find that they must eliminate layers and flatten their hierarchies. David Couper has eliminated the deputy chief layer between him and his captains. Phoenix eliminated 39 middle managers in one year, using an early retirement program. (It saved \$1.5 million in the process.) Fox Valley Technical College has eliminated one vice president and six middle management positions over the past three years, simply by not replacing people when they retire.

### **THE TEAMWORK ORGANIZATION**

Wherever we have found participatory organizations, we have found teamwork. Madison used quality circles; the Tactical Air



When Ron Contino took over the Bureau of Motor Equipment in New York City, labor-management relations were disastrous. So Contino decided his first move had to be a top-level labor committee, to prove to the work force that he was willing to share power. He asked the 20 union locals that represented his workers to nominate members. "I said, 'Give me the guy in your union hall that's always yelling about how lousy things are and how they've got to change,'" Contino remembers. "That's the guy I want."

Members of the Labor Committee were relieved of their other duties. They worked full-time on improving the organization: visiting work sites to ask their members how their jobs could be improved, bringing back formal suggestions, and meeting weekly with Contino and his top managers. In a year and a half, their ideas saved nearly \$2 million. As employees realized their representatives had genuine power, they began coming forward with more suggestions. Having earned their trust, Contino then created labor-management committees throughout the organization. They helped develop the "profit center" and "contracting-in" initiatives described in chapter 3, which saved additional millions of dollars.

Many unions are ready for this kind of partnership. AFSCME now negotiates labor-management committees into many of its contracts. In Rochester and Dade County, the American Federation of Teachers has been a full partner in sweeping education reform efforts. And in Madison, the unions have been important allies in the Total Quality Management process.

### **No-Layoff Policies**

Perhaps the best way to secure union cooperation is to adopt a policy of no layoffs. As noted in chapter 1, most governments lose 10 percent of their employees every year, so attrition often creates room for flexibility. Governments don't have to guarantee people the job they have, but they can guarantee *a* job, at comparable pay. Visalia did this. Phoenix guaranteed jobs, although not always comparable pay. District 4 in East Harlem has not laid off any teachers.



*Employee Evaluation of Managers*, although not yet widely used, is a powerful tool. Supervisors in the Madison Police Department developed a Four-Way Check, which solicits feedback from their employees, their peers, their bosses, and themselves.

*Invention Policies* help employees patent and develop new products or processes they invent. Visalia will put up the money to secure a patent, then either help with development, let the employee handle development, or help the employee license the invention to a private company. The state of Oregon and one of its employees owned the first patent for raised lane dividers on highways.

*Innovation Champions* encourage teams of employees to innovate and champion their efforts when they do. Minnesota's STEP program is described on pages 272-275, but Hawaii and Washington State have similar programs. In Washington's Teamwork Incentive Program, teams of employees that want to make changes in service delivery, reduce costs, or increase revenues apply to a productivity board. When their accomplishments are verified, they share 25 percent of the monetary gains. In its first seven years, the program saved the state \$50 million.

*Reward Programs* are used to honor high achievers in virtually every entrepreneurial organization we have encountered. The National Forest Service's Groo Award is the most participatory award we have seen: every year each employee can give one other employee an award for outstanding performance. Fittingly, the award is named after its inventor, forestry technician Tyler Groo.

Command relied on squadrons; the Bureau of Motor Equipment used employee teams of all kinds. Visalia and St. Paul constantly created cross-departmental teams to develop new projects. East Harlem's schools were *run* by teams. This is no accident. When organizations push authority into the hands of employees, they quickly discover that to get a handle on major problems or decisions, those employees need to work together in teams.



## THE VARIETIES AND TECHNIQUES OF PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT

Participatory management varies in depth and quality. Some efforts are window-dressing; some are revolutionary. Some managers simply want more input from employees, but don't want to share power. Others view their employees as genuine partners who share responsibility for all aspects of the organization's productivity and quality of work life. The further organizations move along this path, the greater the payoff. There are almost an infinite number of devices they can use along the way:

*Quality Circles* are voluntary, temporary teams that use Deming's methods to improve work processes. They choose a problem or process to improve, then measure results, analyze data, pinpoint underlying causes, design and implement solutions, check the results, refine their solutions, and try again. In TQM lingo, they "Plan, Do, Check, Act."

*Labor-Management Committees* give managers and labor representatives a permanent forum in which to discuss their concerns. The Phoenix Department of Public Works, for instance, uses quality circles to attack specific problems, but it also has a labor-management committee to keep permanent lines of communication open on broader issues.

*Employee Development Programs* help employees develop their talents and capacities through training sessions, workshops, and the like. Organizations that provide such opportunities and follow up by promoting from within generate tremendous loyalty and commitment. At one point in Visalia, where city employees run the entire program, both the personnel director and the risk manager were former police officers. The airport manager was a former secretary.

*Attitude Surveys* give leaders more information about their employees' feelings than virtually any other technique. Both Phoenix and Fox Valley Technical College survey their employees every year. When an employee survey in the Madison Police Department revealed dissatisfaction with the way promotions were awarded, the chief asked a team of officers to create an entirely new system.



- And those with a person orientation, such as social groups, exist simply to serve the needs of their members.

Entrepreneurial organizations clearly fall into the task-oriented category. Because task-oriented organizations do whatever it takes to achieve results, Harrison explained, they typically change their structures and procedures as their tasks change. They constantly set up project teams and task forces. "These temporary systems can be activated quickly, provided with the necessary mix of skills and abilities, and disbanded again when the need is past. Their use provides what is, in effect, a continuously variable organization structure," Harrison wrote. As a result, "the task-oriented organization's greatest strength is dealing with complex and changing environments." In contrast, power- and role-oriented organizations have trouble dealing with change, because both "associate control with a *position* in the organization; neither provides for rapid and rational reassignment of appropriate *persons* to positions of influence."

Centralized, hierarchical organizations also divide themselves up into many layers and boxes. People begin to identify with their *unit*—their *turf*. Communication across units and between layers becomes difficult. This explains why innovative organizations so often use teams, according to Rosabeth Moss Kanter.

"The primary set of roadblocks to innovation result from segmentation," Kanter wrote in *The Change Masters*: "a structure finely divided into departments and levels, each with a tall fence around it and communication in and out restricted—indeed, carefully guarded." Even when one innovation succeeds, the innovation rarely spreads—because the communication between departments is so minimal and the fences so high.

In contrast, innovative organizations foster constant communication, so information flows quickly through their ranks. To do this, they regularly create new teams and new configurations, so nearly everyone comes into contact with nearly everyone else. In innovative organizations, Kanter says, "job charters are broad"; work assignments are "ambiguous, non-routine, and change-directed"; "job territories are intersecting"; and employees have



Peters and Waterman described identical behavior in entrepreneurial companies. "Small groups are, quite simply, the basic organizational building blocks of excellent companies," they wrote:

*The action-oriented bits and pieces come under many labels—champions, teams, task forces, czars, project centers, skunk works, and quality circles—but they have one thing in common. They never show up on the formal organization chart and seldom in the corporate phone directory. They are nevertheless the most visible part of the adhocracy that keeps the company fluid.*

Nearly 25 years ago, in *The Age of Discontinuity*, Peter Drucker explained why knowledge workers require teamwork organizations:

*Knowledge workers still need a superior. . . . But knowledge work itself knows no hierarchy, for there are no "higher" and "lower" knowledges. Knowledge is either relevant to a given task or irrelevant to it. The task decides, not the name, the age, or the budget of the discipline, or the rank of the individual plying it. . . .*

*Knowledge, therefore, has to be organized as a team in which the task decides who is in charge, when, for what, and for how long.*

In 1972, social psychologist Roger Harrison explained why entrepreneurial organizations rely so heavily on teams. Harrison divided organizations into four basic types:

- Those with a power orientation, including many traditional businesses, are autocratic and hierarchical.
- Those with a role orientation, such as traditional government bureaucracies, are carefully ordered by rules, procedures, and hierarchy.
- Those with a task orientation, like technology-oriented businesses, are extremely fluid and results-oriented.



within departmental lines, and organizations which don't realize that are going to endure a lot of frustration and relatively inadequate responses to changing times," says George Britton, a deputy city manager in Phoenix.

- Teams build lasting networks throughout an organization, because everyone gets to know like-minded people in other departments. Ideas and information flow more rapidly, and action becomes easier. To get anything significant done within a large organization, every entrepreneur needs an informal network of allies.
- Teams hold employees to high standards, acting as a more acceptable quality control mechanism than evaluations and orders from the top. In East Harlem, where small teams of teachers run most schools, teachers who don't perform "fall by the wayside on their own, because of the peer pressure that's put upon them within their own collegial group," says John Falco. "If you have one rotten apple in the bunch, it impacts the others. They put the pressure on. Those teachers see themselves; they come to me. They say, 'I can't make it here.' Many of them choose to go elsewhere, or to leave the system."

### CREATING AN INSTITUTIONAL CHAMPION FOR BOTTOMS-UP INNOVATION

To be successful, participatory organizations must not only empower employees and teams, but protect them. Not all managers want their employees mucking around with decisions. Many of the participatory management efforts of the early 1980s failed, in fact, because managers did not support them. In Madison, managers were so unsupportive in the early years of quality management that at one point, every member of a quality team resigned.

Participatory management is also risky. It encourages employees to share information and confront underlying issues. In

enough "local autonomy" to "go ahead with large chunks of action without waiting for higher-level approval."

Madison illustrated Kanter's argument perfectly. When Mayor Sensenbrenner introduced TQM, he quickly discovered that the high walls between departments were among the greatest barriers to quality and innovation. His first quality team, at the Motor Equipment Division, isolated the city's policy of purchasing the cheapest (and therefore the lowest quality) parts as one of the underlying causes of vehicle maintenance problems. Sensenbrenner and the team decided to see if they could change the policy. First they visited the parts purchaser, who agreed that the policy was unwise but blamed central purchasing. So they visited central purchasing, whose staff again agreed with them, but said the city comptroller wouldn't let them change the policy. When they visited the comptroller, he also agreed—but said the city attorney would never approve a policy change. Finally, they visited the city attorney. What did he say? "Why, of course you can do that. . . . In fact, I assumed you were doing it all along."

"This," says Sensenbrenner, "was a stunning disclosure."

**I**n addition to their capacity to innovate, to accomplish tasks, and to respond rapidly to changing environments, teamwork organizations display a series of other strengths:

- Cross-departmental teams bring different perspectives to bear on problems or opportunities, from different parts of the organization. People in isolated departments see only the local symptoms of a problem. Teams can see the whole problem.
- Team members who are confronted with different perspectives begin to think "outside the box" of their own department. When they take that habit back to their own office, they often dream up better ways to accomplish their goals.
- Teams break down turf walls, fostering collaboration across departments. "The issues no longer fit neatly



Andres understood that productivity was not something that could be imposed from without. It had to be built in from below. "The way to get it is to empower the employees to do what's right," he told Peter Hutchinson, the vice president he assigned to the project. "When you help people figure out what's right—and empower people to do it—you get great results. You get results that are way beyond anything you could dream up in the big offices upstairs."

Hutchinson took this message to the working group that Sandra Hale, Perpich's commissioner of administration, had put together to design STEP. They proposed a bottoms-up, team-oriented approach—with a new name—and the governor agreed.

The program was simple. Perpich appointed a STEP board, which he and Andres cochaired. It solicited proposals from employees who had innovative ideas, and it chose the most promising as official STEP projects. It used criteria similar to those entrepreneurial governments were embracing all across America. STEP projects had to be proposed by a team, they could not require any new money, and they had to embody at least one of six principles: customer orientation, participatory management, decentralization of authority, performance measurement, new partnerships, or state-of-the-art technology.

The STEP seal of approval did four things. It gave people permission to innovate. It offered them technical assistance. It forced their bosses to sit up and listen. And it gave them protection when the inevitable flak hit.

One of the first STEP teams convinced the Department of Natural Resources to change its attitude toward its customers. During the mid-1980s, use of the state's 64 parks was declining and budget problems were nibbling away at the parks. A group of people within the department decided that they needed a marketing program. They applied for STEP status and won. First they asked park managers to brainstorm about what their customers wanted; soon managers were putting in children's play equipment in parks and electric hookups at campsites. Then they created the Passport Club—a kind of frequent-flyer



the fishbowl of city hall or the state capitol, where reporters are constantly looking for conflict and leaks, this invites negative publicity. "The wariness of this risk is one of the major fears that holds public managers back" from participatory efforts, according to Robert Krim, who runs the Boston Management Consortium, a public-private management consulting firm created by the city to help its departments.

Rudy Perpich, governor of Minnesota from 1976 to 1979 and 1983 to 1991, created an interesting solution: a kind of institutional "champion," designed to empower and protect entrepreneurs deep within the bureaucracy. Called Strive Toward Excellence in Performance (STEP), it was effective enough to win one of the Ford Foundation's first Innovation Awards.

STEP had an interesting history. During Perpich's first term, he had learned firsthand how much state employees resented edicts sent down from the top. To cut spending, he had created a Committee on Waste and Mismanagement. It had nickel-and-dimed employees in the worst way: forbidding them from buying new file cabinets, turning off every other overhead light, banning coffee-making machines from state offices. To this day, employees in Minnesota remember when the governor took away their coffee machines. In 1978, many of them took their revenge on election day, and Perpich went down to an unexpected defeat.

For the next four years, Perpich worked for the Control Data Corporation, in its Vienna office. There he learned something about managing knowledge workers. He particularly remembers the fury when American managers told their Austrian employees they could no longer keep wine in their office coolers.

When Perpich was reelected in 1982, Minnesota again faced drastic fiscal problems. His first impulse was to create a business group like the Grace Commission, which had combed through the federal government for waste, then submitted a gargantuan report that gathered dust on many shelves. Perpich planned to call it Strive Toward Efficiency and Productivity. Fortunately, he asked Dayton-Hudson Chairman William Andres to cochair the group.



rules before those at the bottom can innovate. Good ideas may bubble up from below, but in centralized systems those ideas are usually ignored. To empower employees to act on their ideas, policy makers must decentralize the locus of decision-making.

New mayors and governors, who so often create commissions to root out waste and increase productivity, could learn an enormous amount from STEP's success and Perpich's first-term failure. The contrast demonstrates one of our favorite maxims: efforts to improve productivity usually undermine both productivity and morale; efforts to improve morale by empowering employees usually heighten both morale and productivity.

### INVESTING IN THE EMPLOYEE

Decentralization can work only if leaders are willing to invest in their employees. As General Creech said of his troops, "You can't treat them shabbily, and house them shabbily, and expect quality work in return." We found over and over again that entrepreneurial organizations paid their employees well and worked to improve the physical quality of their workplaces. In addition, they invested heavily in training.

No one wants poorly trained employees making important decisions, yet few governments spend much on training. Accurate statistics do not exist, but virtually everyone who has studied the situation believes that government spends far less on training than does business.

During the 1980s, Paul Volcker's National Commission on the Public Service estimated that the federal government spent roughly 1 percent of the civilian, nonpostal payroll for training, compared to 3 percent in Fortune 500 companies. In 1990, the Governor's Management Review Commission, in New Jersey, reported that the state spent only six one-hundredths of 1 percent of its \$300 million management and supervisory payroll on training or development. Western Electric, a major New Jersey corporation, spent 100 times that amount.



program for park users, to lure them to outlying parks that were not heavily used. Next they began accepting credit cards, running advertising, and promoting park permits as Christmas gifts. Sales jumped 300 percent. Then they brought in a private company to improve their gift shops, and gift sales increased by 50 percent. Finally, they conducted a customer survey of 1,300 park users.

During the first year after the marketing strategy took effect, the number of park visitors jumped by 10 percent. Numbers like these got the department managers' attention; in 1987 they created a marketing coordinator position and hired the STEP team leader to fill it. They also set up their own Innovations Board, to keep an atmosphere of change alive in the department.

Another STEP project, in the agency that issues driver's licenses, cut waiting time for the public in half. Yet another helped the Department of Human Resources dig out from under a backlog of racial discrimination complaints against landlords, employers, and banks. This one demonstrated the role of STEP as a champion of innovation—a formal protector of entrepreneurs within the bureaucracy. When the department commissioner refused to give her staff the time needed to develop the new program, STEP's executive director threatened to tell the governor the project had failed because top management had not supported it. The next day, the commissioner relented.

The Perpich administration learned a number of valuable lessons from STEP, which it summarized in a book called *Managing Change: A Guide to Producing Innovation from Within*. One was that innovation often comes from the bottom up. "At least one-third of the (STEP) project managers are line employees, not middle or upper management," the book reported. Another was that projects run by teams do much better than those run by individuals. The lesson: "The Lone Ranger is not an appropriate role model." A third was that decentralization requires a firm commitment from the top. Without Perpich's full support, STEP would not have worked. Ironically, in centralized institutions and systems—whether state governments, school systems, or federal programs—those at the top must often change the



people wanted done—particularly the hard work of racial integration. But 30 years later, many state and local governments are not only more effective than the federal government, but more progressive as well.

State leaders have been complaining bitterly about overregulation from Washington for 25 years, and local leaders increasingly complain about overregulation from state government. Ronald Reagan promised a “new federalism” but did little more than cut federal aid, leaving behind what some call “fend for yourself federalism.” Clearly, it is time for an intelligent sorting out of federal, state, and local roles.

This is not the place for a full discussion of the solution; tomes have already been written on the subject. Let us simply suggest a rule of thumb, articulated by the National Conference of State Legislatures: unless there is an important reason to do otherwise, responsibility for addressing problems should lie with the lowest level of government possible.

The closer a government is to its citizens, polls show, the more they trust it. The closer it is, the more accountable its officials tend to be and the more likely they are to handcraft solutions rather than create one-size-fits-all programs.

Were we to adopt this rule of thumb, the federal government might have fewer employees and provide fewer direct services, but its role in steering American society would not decrease. In many areas, it would still have responsibility for providing funds and setting an overall policy framework, even if it delivered no services. These would include:

- Policy areas that transcend the capacities of state and local governments, such as international trade, macroeconomic policy, and much environmental and regulatory policy.
- Antipoverty policy, which requires investment in precisely those regions with the fewest financial resources. To equalize each area's ability to invest, the federal government must act.
- Social insurance programs like social security and unemployment compensation. If we want equal benefits



As they have moved into a globally competitive knowledge economy, in which constant updating of skills is virtually a prerequisite of survival, businesses have dramatically increased their investments in training. Entrepreneurial governments have learned the same lesson. Visalia was the first outside organization to send managers to Hewlett-Packard's management training program. Madison invests heavily in training. Phoenix provides 25 different courses for its employees every quarter. Like many governments, it also offers tuition reimbursement for employees who take courses at an accredited college.

Some unions even invest in training. According to Rob McGarrah, AFSCME often puts up money to get public agencies to provide training. AFSCME's District Council 37, in New York City, runs its own college. "Our members are hungry—almost desperate—for training," McGarrah says.

### DECENTRALIZING THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

For many of our readers in the nation's capital, the issue of decentralization is synonymous with the issue of federalism. During the 1960s and 1970s, in a burst of national activism, we overcentralized many activities of government. Between 1963 and 1980, Congress created 387 new categorical grant programs—separate pots of federal money, tied up in federal rules and regulations, to pay for services delivered by state or local government. By 1977, they accounted for \$1 of every \$4 spent by state and local governments. Despite severe funding cuts and passage of a few consolidated block grants, 475 categorical grants still existed in 1991. And as the federal deficit widened, Congress increasingly turned to mandates—in essence, categorical programs *without* the funds.

We centralized responsibility for good reasons. During the industrial era, those in Washington had far more information and capacity than those in smaller state and local governments. And during the 1960s, many state and local governments were unwilling to do much of what the American



This funding formula forced centers to embrace the *mission* defined by the state—commercial development of technological innovations—and to push for the *results* the state wanted—private sector investment and job creation in Pennsylvania. But it left each center free to define its own methods.

Translated to the federal level, this approach would suggest broad Challenge Grants in a variety of policy areas. The federal government would set up broad criteria, based on factors such as need, quality of program, results, and state or local commitment. It would then make state or local governments compete for the grants. Several organizations, including the Committee on Federalism and National Purpose, the National Neighborhood Coalition, and the Heritage Foundation, have proposed mechanisms along this line. Congress has even debated a competitive grant program for antidrug strategies.

This approach would create incentives for state and local governments, but would leave the job of designing and running programs in their hands. By using performance criteria, Washington could exercise quality control without dictating program structure and content. And by making governments compete based on rational criteria, it could drive them toward the creation of entrepreneurial strategies. In this way, Challenge Grants could replace categorical grants and block grants as the heart of a genuine New Federalism.

throughout the country, we cannot expect rich and poor states to shoulder the same burden.

- Investments that are so costly that they require sizable tax increases, which might discourage business from locating or staying in a city or state (one obvious example is health care). States will avoid such responsibilities, for fear of discouraging investment, unless the federal government bears much of the financial burden.

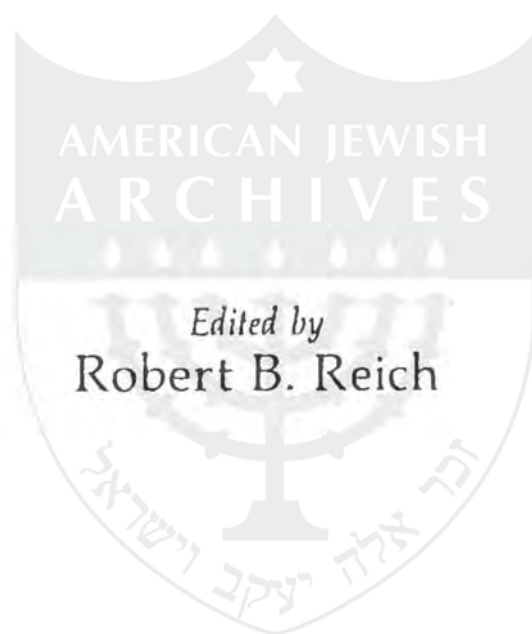
Even in many of these cases, however, programs can be designed to allow for significant flexibility at the state or local level. The federal government can define the mission and the outcomes it wants, but free lower governments to achieve those outcomes as they see fit.

What we really need is a new model of grant program, built around the principles of entrepreneurial government. Fortunately, state governments have struggled with the same issue and come up with some intriguing models. During the 1980s, Pennsylvania Governor Richard Thornburgh and his policy chief, Walt Plosila, designed one of the nation's most successful programs to stimulate technological innovation and entrepreneurship. Called the Ben Franklin Partnership, it was essentially a grant program for four regional networks called Advanced Technology Centers. Each center made matching grants, called Challenge Grants, to small businesses, academic organizations and other organizations that invested in technological innovation.

For our purposes, the key innovation was the method by which the centers were funded. Every spring, each of the four centers would submit a package of applications for Challenge Grants. The state Ben Franklin board would rate each potential grant according to a set of criteria: the project's potential for commercial application, the number of jobs it would create, the quantity of the private sector investment, and so on. It would also rank each center's past results, on measures such as job creation, corporate match, and the ability of grantees to attract venture capital. Centers with higher average ratings would get more money. They could then divide up their allocation as they wished.



# THE POWER OF PUBLIC IDEAS



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## Chapter 8





## CHAPTER 8

# Political Leadership: Managing The Public's Problem Solving

*Ronald A. Heifetz and Riley M. Sinder*

Prevailing ideas about what is good for society often determine how problems are posed, which actions are taken, and by whom. Public ideas have the power to lead and mislead. What then are the responsibilities of those who make and implement policy in regard to such ideas? In Chapter Six, Robert Reich argues that, at least on occasion, public managers have an obligation to instigate public deliberation rather than simply make policy decisions, that in directing public attention toward these ideas, public managers broaden the range of possibilities for public action and deepen society's self-understanding. In Chapter Seven, Giandomenico Majone suggests that policy analysts as well as office holders have responsibility for improving the quality of public discourse by probing assumptions, raising issues, and thereby helping the public consider different formulations of problems and a wider set of possible solutions.

In this chapter, we examine political leadership. We suggest that the idea of leadership itself shapes the processes by which a society does its work, and further that the current view restricts and diminishes the public's capacity to address the complex problem situations of public policy. We examine this prevailing view and some of its shortcomings, and we introduce a different account of political leadership and its role in public problem solving.

### The Idea of Leadership

Perhaps better than any theorist, Richard Nixon summarized the conventional wisdom on leadership. In his "Silent Majority" speech of 1969, he described the task as he saw it:

audience. Analysis-as-argument holds that any topic relevant to public discussion is an appropriate subject for serious inquiry. Analysts of this school do not reject means-ends calculations, where they are appropriate, but maintain that good arguments and open communication are not merely means to the end of efficiency, but ends in themselves.





Here again, the task of leadership consists of providing a vision and taking action to realize that vision through the medium of an organization. Leaders in corporations, like leaders in the public sector, are often expected to "offer new visions" and bring in "new values and norms." They must project their idea of the future, their vision, their values and norms in a way that institutionalizes what they see. The mark of leadership, once more, is the leader's success in realizing his guiding vision; the means of implementation are interactive. In a similar vein, organization and group theorists typically describe a leader as "an individual who has the authority to decide, direct, and represent the objectives and functions of an organization."<sup>5</sup>

Most notions of leadership share certain basic assumptions. The preceding descriptions are illustrative in that they emphasize (1) providing vision or taking stands, and (2) interacting effectively when managing power and authority in order to generate sufficient organizational and political alignment to realize the leader's intentions. These common assumptions form a prevailing underlying theory or idea of leadership.

### *The Demand for Leadership*

Governments, corporations, and individuals spend a great deal of time and money training people in "leadership." Programs in leadership are sprouting up in cities, consulting firms, and schools all over the country.<sup>6</sup> The frequently expressed concern that the United States is undergoing a "crisis in leadership" and the emphasis placed on judging President Reagan's leadership qualities (as opposed to President Carter's) suggest that people are looking to leadership for answers. It is as if many of us are swept up in a groundswell of excitement, even a clamoring, for effective leadership.

The prevailing idea of leadership, then, may be important to investigate, not only for its intrinsic interest but because the kind of leadership we praise, teach, and operate with may shape the futures of many people. The idea itself may affect the realities we live with and make.

But it would be a mistake to suggest that our interest in leadership is something new. We can certainly see a clamoring for leadership as far back as the days of the prophet Samuel, who pondered with God how to answer the people's curious longing and demand for a king. Neither Samuel nor God could see the reason for it. God, having just saved the Hebrew tribes from attack by the Philistines, interpreted the yearning

A leader must be willing to take unpopular stands when they are necessary. . . . And when he does find it necessary to take an unpopular stand, he has an obligation to explain it to the people, solicit their support, and win their approval.<sup>1</sup>

Nixon articulated the task of leadership as it is generally understood in the public sector. First, a leader identifies himself\* by taking stands, even unpopular stands. The assumption is that a leader must have an agenda, even if it is controversial. Second, to implement his agenda, a leader is expected to reach out to the people, explain his position, solicit the support of the people, and gain their acceptance. The mark of leadership is to succeed in carrying out one's stand; the means of succeeding involve skillfully interacting with the people.

Many scholars have also attempted to define leadership.<sup>2</sup> Kellerman's recent study describes the task of presidential leadership in terms similar to Nixon's:

Since directive presidential leadership is an interactive process heavily dependent on the informal use of sources of power. . . . a president must have (1) the vision and motivation to define and articulate his agenda so as to broaden his base of support; and (2) some considerable ability to perform effectively in those interpersonal transactions necessary for bringing about his most important goals.<sup>3</sup>

Although Kellerman makes the important tactical point that presidential leadership requires the skillful use of informal sources of power, leadership is again defined as having a vision or agenda of one's own, coupled with the ability to articulate one's message, gain support through transactional means, and bring one's own goals to fruition.

The same idea of leadership appears to prevail in the private sector. In a recent study of ninety leaders, Bennis and Nanus summarized the conventional wisdom in this way:

Leadership is what gives an organization its vision and its ability to translate that vision into reality.

The leader, as social architect, must be part artist, part designer, part master craftsman, facing the challenge of aligning the elements of the social architecture so that, like an ideal building, it becomes a creative synthesis uniquely suited to realizing the guiding vision of the leader. . . . The effective leader needs to articulate new values and norms, offer new visions, and use a variety of tools in order to transform, support, and institutionalize new meanings and directions.<sup>4</sup>

\*Throughout this chapter, masculine pronouns denote a person of either sex.



The prevailing conception of leadership seems to conform to the laws of supply and demand, in that leaders and theorists of the subject have adopted an idea of leadership that follows from what "followers" are asking for. Constituents appear to want answers to their questions, solutions to their problems, security in their surroundings, and a sense that their individual activities are connected to larger purposes and thus are meaningful. And leaders have viewed leadership accordingly: taking stands, providing solutions, having a vision, and interacting with constituents by explaining, supporting, and ordering so that they feel part of the vision and secure in knowing what to do.

### *The Traps Inherent in the Conventional Wisdom*

Of course, no leader can consistently provide constituents with solutions, security, or meaning. Perhaps all that a leader can reliably provide, given such expectations, is failed expectations. Although individuals are generally more sensible than to expect leaders to provide all those things, cultural norms and public ideas are not formed simply by individuals. They are formed by group systems of political, organizational, and social interaction. (*Group* is used generically in this chapter to include each of these systems.) Public ideas arise when individuals repeatedly base decisions on their perceptions of what most other people think the norms and public procedures are. For example, if people think that nearly everybody around them understands an issue in a certain way, they will be inclined to act in agreement with that prevailing understanding. Even authority figures, although they may not agree with the prevailing understanding, will have to base their actions on how they think their public will view events, if they are to achieve practical results. Public ideas and conventional wisdom take on a life of their own, quite apart from anyone's private sensibilities.

The conventional wisdom on leadership does not dictate that a leader fulfill all the specific expectations of the constituents. As Nixon suggested, a leader's solution may run contrary to the trends in the group. Still, the conventional view requires that a leader design and implement some solution. He must have some agenda to call his own. Although a leader may have the leeway to innovate by coming up with new solutions, it would be quite unleaderlike, according to conventional wisdom, not to come up with any solution at all.

Theorists have invested great effort in discovering and assessing the means by which a leader can provide and implement solutions, as

for a king as a rejection of His authority and guidance, according to Samuel. The prophet tried to dissuade the people.

But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said: "Nay; but there shall be a king over us; that we may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight out battles."<sup>7</sup>

The inclination of people to look to leaders for answers may well go back as far as the first agricultural societies with complex economies.<sup>8</sup> The yearning for leadership is an ancient phenomenon. And like any demand that finds its way into the marketplace, this yearning has been met with a supply. Leaders have appeared, or were chosen.

The supply of leadership seems to have been shaped by the character of the demand for it. People facing complex and frustrating situations wanted answers, protection, and order. Those who came forward to supply those demands were called leaders. Different styles of leadership were called forth depending on the particular situation and the norms of society, yet these styles were variations on a common theme. The basic idea of leadership remained fairly constant.

#### *The Character of the Demand and How It Has Shaped the Conventional Wisdom*

"What do your constituents expect or demand of you as a leader?" We posed this question to hundreds of executive and midcareer students at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The group included elected, appointed, and career officials from federal, state, and local governments; civil servants from many foreign lands; and corporate executives responsible for business-government relations. There were mayors, top- and middle-level managers in government agencies and private corporations, entry-level public servants, members of Congress, congressional staff, diplomats, all levels of military officers, foreign ministers, and heads of banks. Their responses were remarkably consistent.

Constituents expect them to provide solutions, security, and meaning. Constituents also demand many variations on these themes: answers, vision, inspiration, hope, consistency, order, direction, and "just tell me what to do." The officials in turn believe that these expectations are the norm and that their task as leaders is to fulfill them.



Second, and perhaps more telling, conventional leadership operates with a basic misconception regarding how a society succeeds in addressing complex public problems. Difficult public policy situations are hard to define and resolve precisely because they demand the work and responsibility of the constituents. Thus many complex problems are not amenable to solutions provided by leaders; their solutions require that constituents address the problematic situations that face them.

### A Typology of Situations

By way of analogy, consider the job of a physician. Patients and their families routinely come to physicians expecting solutions, and physicians, like leaders, try to provide them. The role of the physician and the conventional wisdom that reinforces it have been shaped by the group's demand. Physicians define their job in terms of providing solutions; they diagnose, treat, and try to cure illness.

This characterization of the doctor's job is perfectly adequate in some situations. To a patient with an infection, for example, the physician can sometimes say, "I have an antibiotic medication that will almost definitely cure you without any effort or life adjustment needed on your part. The medication is virtually harmless. I can give you one shot, or a week of pills, whichever you prefer." We can call this a Type I situation—one in which the patient's expectations that the doctor can provide a solution are realistic and the problem situation can be defined, treated, and cured using the doctor's expertise and requiring very little work on the part of the patient. These are the straightforward mechanical situations in which one can go to somebody and "get it fixed." And from the doctor's point of view, these are those gratifying moments when he can actually solve a patient's problem. Although the patient's cooperation will be crucial in Type I situations, the weight of problem defining and problem solving falls on the physician.

Type II situations are far more common. Here the problem is definable but no clear-cut technical solution is available; the doctor can offer some remedies but no cures. Heart disease sometimes presents a Type II situation. The patient can be restored to more or less full operating capacity, but only if he takes responsibility for his health by making appropriate life adjustments; in particular, he may have to consider the doctor's prescriptions regarding long-term medication, exercise, diet program, stress reduction, and so forth. Type II situations



well as the special personal qualities needed to implement his solutions.<sup>9</sup> Many recent writers have attempted to transcend making value judgments of a leader's particular solution or vision, focusing instead on the strategic and tactical means by which a leader can accomplish his aims—whether through a better understanding of political interchange and the mechanisms for managing power and influence, practical insights into the design and behavior of organizations, or effective communication, the development of trust, and efforts to empower others.<sup>10</sup> In effect, scholars and theorists have based their work on the popular understanding of leadership, which is left unquestioned.

There are dangers in using the expectations of the group to define the idea of leadership. The group insists that the leader provide solutions. Yet only a very limited number of problematic situations can be resolved by a leader providing solutions; and therein lies the trap. Even in situations where solutions can be given, the very act of providing them will reinforce the group's presumption that leaders can be relied upon to find solutions and should be expected to do so.

The trap has two victims: the leader and the group. When the leader is successful in providing solutions, the group will probably expect more of him in the future. Conventional success in leadership will prompt the group to "up the ante." Although this response may flatter a leader's vanity, it is full of peril. It is possible that success will establish a track record that buys the leader some latitude and time to have failures, perhaps even enough time for him to die a natural death while remaining a hero to his people. But if the problems are great, the group's rising expectations may eventually surpass the leader's magical powers, causing his downfall. The twentieth century is full of such leaders (Ferdinand Marcos, Lyndon Johnson, Indira Gandhi, Benito Mussolini) whose early successes fostered unrealistic expectations, both within themselves and in their constituents.

The trap is equally dangerous for the group. First, conventional success in leadership may decrease the group's own adaptive capacity. Repeated success, just as it increases dependency on the leader, may weaken the constituents' ability to face, define, and solve problems. The danger for the group could be reduced if the leader took steps, during and after success, to discourage the predilection to look to him for more answers in the future. Of course, leaders, operating by the conventional wisdom, usually do just the opposite when they meet with success; they bolster the group's inflated expectations.



In Type III situations, and often in Type II, the physician can help the patient face the situation, define problems, and develop solutions, but he cannot "fix it." Therefore it is counterproductive for the doctor to define his task within a framework based on patients' expectations (i.e., to provide solutions, to diagnose and treat illness).

An alternative definition of the physician's job—"helping the patient do his work"—would serve well in each of these situations. If the problem definition and treatment are clear-cut (Type I), then helping the patient face and adjust to his problematic reality will consist of telling him he has a certain problem and recommending the appropriate treatment. If the problem definition is clear-cut but the treatment is not purely technical (Type II), so that the patient must evaluate and make life adjustments, then education and persuasion may be needed to mobilize the patient's resources to do that work. And if the problem situation is complex and the treatment unclear (Type III), then the treatment will require the patient's participation in defining the specific problems within the overall situation and devising solutions for each. The doctor cannot do this work; only the patient and his family can determine how the problems should be defined in the first place, let alone treated. Although the particular style of the physician will have to change depending on the type of situation, the basic stance of the physician—to help the patient do his work—will remain constant.

### The Realm of Public Policy

Many important problems in any realm are of Type II and Type III. Public policy is no exception. The problems are messy. Many people are involved, and many of them disagree on the definition as well as the treatment of the problem. With poverty, crime, international disputes, pollution, education policy, and so forth, much of the work consists of defining the problem, not just solving it. Furthermore, in public policy situations of types II and III, the defining and solving comprise significant political and social learning processes as the various constituencies involved sort out their orientation, values, and potential tradeoffs. No "leader" can magically do this work.

Only the group—the relevant community of interests—can do this work. It must do the sorting and learning necessary to define what constitutes a problem. It must make the adaptations and adjustments to the problem situation that most solutions require. Solutions in

can be managed only partially by the physician in a mechanical way. He diagnoses and prescribes, but his recommendations will have side effects requiring the patient's evaluation of the tradeoffs.

In Type III situations, the problem definition is not clear-cut, and no technical fixes are available. Chronic disability or impending death from any cause fits this category. In these situations, the doctor can continue to operate in a mechanical mode by diagnosing and prescribing remedies (and a remedy of some sort can usually be found). But if he does so, the problem-defining and -solving work of both doctor and patient will be avoided. In these situations, treating the illness is too narrow a way to define the physician's task. The problem, and consequently the required work, have to be understood more broadly than the particular diagnosis. When critical aspects of the situation are probably unchangeable, the problem must be distinguished from the medical condition—the diagnosis. For example, if the patient's diagnosis is an advanced stage of cancer in which the likelihood of cure is remote, it may be useless—indeed, a denial of reality—to define the primary problem as cancer. Cancer, in this case, is a condition. To the limited extent it can be treated at all, it is only part of the problem. To define cancer as the primary problem leads everyone involved to concentrate on finding solutions to the cancer, thus diverting their attention from the work at hand. The patient's work consists of facing and making adjustments to harsh realities that go beyond his health condition and that include several possible problems: making the most out of life; considering what the children may need after he is gone; preparing a spouse, parents, loved ones, and friends; completing important tasks, and so forth.

Table 8.1 summarizes the characteristics of the three types of situations.

Table 8.1 Situational Types

	<i>Problem Definition</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Primary Locus of Work</i>
Type I	clear	clear	physician
Type II	clear	unclear	physician and patient
Type III	unclear	unclear	patient



routine of action that neglects important parts of the situation. In the case of drug abuse, he may view the problem as drug supply. On the other hand, if he starts with the assumption that most situations are of Type II or Type III, then he will be ready when necessary to help constituents confront those aspects of the situation that are not clearly defined or solved, and that require their work.

As work on issues advances, Type III situations can be broken down partially into Type II and Type I components. As with the drug abuse situation, when conditions are distinguished from problems, and alternative problem definitions are created and sorted through, policy makers and constituents will generate a series of discrete frames for the problem. The point for the policy maker is not to lock any situation into a particular category, but to establish an approach that routinely steers the community toward addressing the essential but frequently most difficult and ignored aspects of a problematic reality—for example, that the demand for drugs may originate within the community itself.

Because constituents may cling rigidly to one way of viewing the situation, the work of defining and solving problems must provoke learning. The act of sorting out their values and points of view on a complex issue, of debating the merits of various competing frames for the problem, is itself part of the adjustment process by which constituents achieve solutions.

Inventive people have sometimes been able to turn Type II and Type III situations into Type I; they find a cure. With advances in natural or social scientific understanding, we occasionally convert messy situations into clear-cut ones. The discovery of penicillin transformed most cases of pneumonia into situations of Type I. Many of us no longer have to live with the uncontrollable flooding of rivers because thousands of years ago some people invented the dam.

Few if any public policy problems are clear-cut, however. Even the building of a dam has problematic side effects. Dams require resources that might be applied to other efforts; they change the demography, ecology, and social structure of an area, with mixed consequences for social values, norms, and behavior. They can burst open with catastrophic results downstream. Though flooding may appear to be a Type I situation, a problem that can be solved by a dam, evidently it is not. Policy makers will be faced with questions like: who is to know how broadly or narrowly to define the problem for which building a



public policy generally consist of adjustments in the community's attitudes and actions. Who else but those with stakes in the situation can make the necessary adjustments? For example, for a nation to successfully go to war, the constituents will have to join the effort and make adjustments in their lives accordingly. In Churchill's first major statement as prime minister—"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat"—he referred to the group's work, not merely his own. For a community to improve public education, constituents will have to make schools a high priority and then evaluate and choose among numerous alternatives, such as setting higher performance standards, upgrading curricula, spending more money on teachers, addressing local poverty, and increasing parent involvement.

To illustrate further, consider the situation of drug abuse. If the supply of drugs is driven primarily by the demand, and if the demand is a product of economic, social, and psychological forces, then defining the problem as drug supply, as is often done, avoids the reality of demand. Unrealistic definitions may mislead the public by directing its attention to an unrealistic set of solutions. More accurate definitions of the problem include drug-related crime and the self-destructive demand for drugs.

Parts of these problems appear to have technical solutions. Many people suggest that drug-related crime would be solved in large part by making drugs legal—that the motives for crime would disappear by making access to drugs cheap. Others argue, however, that this way of defining the problem is too narrow because it fails to address costly tradeoffs regarding social values and responsibility.

In either case, the problem of crime is only one aspect of the drug situation. The problem of people wanting drugs and using them in ways that are personally harmful will not be solved by legalizing drugs or by any other technical remedy. Any solution to this problem will have to consist of adjustments on the part of the community. The elimination of self-destructive drug use may require public education, altering family structures, diminishing unemployment, and changing the ways in which people derive meaning from life.

Upon entering into a problem-solving process, a public official cannot be sure which type of situation he and his constituents face. If he begins with the common assumption of constituents—that problematic situations are of Type I and that the public official can and should "fix them"—he is likely to accept unwittingly a problem definition and a



Rather than posing as a wizard who can always pull the right rabbit out of the hat at the right time, a leader must be wary of ever pulling out rabbits. Such feats tend to create solutions with unintended and unforeseen side effects; worse, they reinforce the conventional wisdom that tough problems require wizards. And everyone knows what happens to wizards when they run into situations for which they have no rabbit.

### The Conventional Wisdom as a Paradigm of Authority

As we have seen, the conventional wisdom regarding leadership has been shaped by people's demands that someone come up with solutions to their problems. If the problem is malaise, then people will demand something to believe in. He who provides something to believe in—regardless, too often, of what that something is—will be chosen as leader.

The demand for solutions in group settings leads to a shift in the locus of work from those facing the problem situation to someone else, usually someone in authority. This does not mean that every organization or social system is structured to pass the buck. It suggests that every social system finds ways to distribute and sometimes avoid work by establishing systems of authorization.

Perhaps no social system can remain viable without some system of authorization by which labor is distributed and oriented to a task, channels of communication and command are established, and structures of empowerment are set in place.<sup>11</sup> Systems of authorization are not only formalized arrangements with set positions; they are, in large part, informal arrangements. The office, the formal authorization, is rarely a sufficient source of leverage by itself to provide power.<sup>12</sup> A high office holder has to gain informal authorization (i.e., respect, trust, fear, bargaining advantages, admiration) if he is to increase his authority, his power to influence. He does so by fulfilling the expectations for which the group informally confers authority.

The conventional idea of leadership describes which expectations an office holder has to promise to fulfill in order to obtain the group's formal and informal authorization. The group authorizes a leader to provide solutions, meaning, and security—in the words of the Bible, to "go out before us, and fight our battles." To gain authority, that is what



dam then becomes the solution? Who is to determine which technical solution to choose among several alternatives, each with a different set of side effects?

Since most situations are of types II and III, the expert in public policy has to become expert, not in providing answers, but in managing the dynamics of the group struggling with its work. In the case of the president, this entails managing Congress, the press, his own agencies, interested parties, and anyone else whose involvement is required for progress in a particular problematic situation. In the case of the middle manager, this involves managing his superiors, subordinates, lateral colleagues, outside parties, and anyone else whose participation is needed to frame and resolve a problematic situation. In the case of the general citizen, this demands engaging organizations, interested parties, the press, political representatives, other citizens—whoever has to be involved in the process by which a group learns its way from a current state of affairs to one that is better.

This job challenges even the most courageous. There is enormous pressure on public officials, like doctors, to maintain the narrow, answer-giving conception of their jobs. Constituents want solutions, particularly when they confront harsh realities. The task of helping them take responsibility for their work becomes daunting. First, it means going against their expectation that the leader can fix things for them—frustrating them in their initial desires. Second, it means holding steady as constituents, over time, begin to face their situation—maintaining one's poise, resolve, and capacity to listen when under attack. Third, it means helping constituents carve out of their messy situations discrete problems needing their attention and work—challenging their assumptions regarding the situation and provoking the discovery of alternative problem definitions. Finally, it necessitates managing the iterative process of devising solutions, making adjustments, and redefining problems as the situation changes and as constituents reorder their priorities along the way.

In all of this, the task of pacing the work is crucial. It takes time for any group to face, assess, and change or adapt to tough situations. Leadership, in this sense, requires expertise. In addition to solving well-defined problems, the public official has to manage the deliberative process by which constituents accomplish work. Beyond technical know-how, he needs the improvisational flexibility and insight to manage others in doing work on frustrating situations where the definition of the problem, let alone the solution, is not clear.



and current set of solutions. The exercise of authority revolves around the dynamic of power: how and why people confer power and how people gain and make use of power. A more useful framework for an idea of leadership, however, may be found elsewhere.

The exercise of leadership revolves around the dynamic of work: how work is both accomplished and avoided by social systems. Leadership mobilizes groups to do work. Often this demands innovation in defining problems, generating solutions, and, perhaps foremost, locating responsibility for defining and solving problems. Power and work provide the axes that orient authority and leadership. They often go hand in hand, but they function distinctly.

The functions of authority are associated with specific formal and informal positions in a social system. The functions of leadership, in contrast, are never defined by a position. For example, the position of assistant secretary in the Department of Transportation will be defined by a series of authorizations—to oversee specific departmental activities, direct particular projects, manage certain people's access to the secretary, and so forth. Similarly the informal position of "devil's advocate" will often be defined by a series of informal authorizations—to question current assumptions, provide deviant ideas, but yet remain a congenial member of the group by knowing when to stop being troublesome. The authorization simultaneously creates a discrete position and enables a set of functions.

Yet one might exercise leadership from any position. Indeed, as soon as one's leadership actions became associated with a specific position, they would merge with the general system of expectations, becoming authority as well as leadership. Thereafter a leader would have to consider carefully both the power and constraints inherent in his authorization. He would be exercising the functions of leadership with both the resources and the extra baggage of an authority position, which carries a host of expectations and its own set of functions. In other words, whereas authority can be described in the domains of both function and position, leadership can be described only within the domain of function. To equate leadership with a position is once again to equate leadership with authority.

### A Concept of Leadership

The common thread between authority and leadership appears to lie in the concept of work. People authorize other people, by and large, because they think they will do some piece of work. And in certain



he must do, promise to do, or appear to do. But in doing so, thus fulfilling his authorization, is he exercising leadership or authority? The two may be very different matters. Because the expectations associated with authority impose sharp limits on behavior, having authority constrains leadership. Stepping across the line jeopardizes one's authority. Furthermore, since groups will tend to pressure authority figures for simple remedies as a way to avoid harsh and complex problems, shouldn't we expect them to collude routinely and even unwittingly in the avoidance of work?

The person with authority in a given setting and situation may not even be in the appropriate role to exercise leadership. Rather than lead people to come to terms with difficult realities, authority figures have often been expected to give, and have given, tranquilizing but fake remedies. Adolf Hitler's use of scapegoating and delusions of grandeur provides an extreme example.

The conventional wisdom blurs this distinction. The tendency is both to equate authority and leadership, and to use the expectations of the group as the frame of reference for defining leadership. When someone gains high office (formal authority), or trust, admiration, and a following (informal authority)—that is what traditionally passes for leadership. But if leadership and authority are distinguished, one sees that the demands of the group provide a frame of reference only for authority. From this perspective, "doing what is expected" outlines the exercise of formal and informal authority, but not leadership.

Proper management of the functions of authority—providing an orienting vision, hope, security, "doing battle for," and so forth—is crucial. Indeed, to go back to the medical analogy, the physician's capacity to lead (i.e., to help the patient do his work) virtually depends upon meeting enough of the patient's expectations to gain his attention and trust. Authority, both formal and informal, is a primary tool for exercising leadership. By fulfilling the functions of authority, one establishes a secure relationship with constituents, making it possible to contain and pace their conflicts and stress in doing problem-defining and problem-solving work. Like the walls and valve of a pressure-cooker, authority can provide the instruments, the power, to hold together and harness the conflictive process of doing work.

If we release the idea of leadership from its mooring as a product of group expectations, what shall we use as a reference point in its stead? Authority and leadership can be seen as two sets of functions that sometimes overlap. Authority protects and maintains the expectations of which it is a product—the group's norms, problem definitions,



are often accepted as normal and go unnoticed. People in positions of authority, like doctors, are quite vulnerable to being drawn into those work-avoidance patterns. For example, physicians are often tempted to provide false information and to cooperate in the denial of seriously ill patients. People who are overweight easily find physicians who prescribe diet pills rather than help their patients do work (gain self-acceptance, change their self-image, control their diet, exercise routinely). Similarly, a nation facing a perilous situation may generate a demagogue, complete with "evil" scapegoats, to provide the illusion of a Type I situation and thus a false sense of security. It is extremely difficult (and risky) for an authority figure to present constituents with the reality they face and the work that is theirs. Taking pride in the authorized and conventional view of oneself as a problem solver may compound the difficulty.

In the realm of public policy, citizens, interest groups, executive agencies, the press, and Congress turn to those they have authorized as problem solvers to take care of problem situations on their behalf. Each level seeks out an authority figure in the next echelon up, until often the president becomes the physician of last resort. And, as we have discussed, as long as those situations are easily defined and technically remediable (Type I), work does indeed get done. But when the situation calls for leadership and not simply the fulfilling of one's authority—that is, when the situation calls for mobilizing the group's resources to face, define and resolve its problems—then a leader, a person trying to get work done, will come up against the group's natural inclination to avoid taking the work back onto its own shoulders. In these situations leadership often requires going against the patterns of constituents, beyond their expectations, and thus outside of one's authority, to get work done. But unlike Richard Nixon's idea of leadership—which assumes that a stand is a policy answer, and answers are to be explained so that the people are won over—this view of leadership sees a stand as a tool for engaging the people in doing work, and sees popular approval as a possible indication of work avoidance within the group.

Of course, it isn't that the person exercising leadership knows what the work is. It isn't that he knows "what to do." The need for leadership arises precisely because there are many highly problematic situations in which no one knows what to do. If the direction were clear, the solution available through technical expertise, then an authority in that field would suffice; one could presumably bring him in, or elect him.<sup>13</sup>



clear-cut situations where technical expertise can provide solutions, authorizing others to do one's work will succeed. But in situations where the group's values are unclear, the shapes of problems are indistinct, and solutions have yet to be fashioned, success requires shifting the primary locus of work back to the group. To do this demands leadership that goes beyond or against the expectations inherent in one's authority. In other words, a person is rarely, if ever, authorized to exercise leadership.

The idea that leadership is a function distinct from authority, and therefore that it lacks positionality, has numerous implications. First, leadership can be exercised at once by several people from varying positions of authority. One organization may exercise leadership vis-à-vis other organizations. Second, there may be no such thing as "seizing leadership," since leadership is not a position but an activity. How can one seize an activity? Third, although some will gain high position and enormous informal authority, they may never exercise leadership. Those whom we call leaders may not be leaders at all, simply figures of authority. From a functional point of view, a leader is anybody who serves the functions of leadership, however he may be perceived by others.

If leadership is the mobilization of a group's resources to do work, and if many situations in the realm of public policy are of types II and III, then the exercise of leadership will require devising policies or taking actions that serve as catalysts of work, rather than solutions to problems. For example, when Mohandas Gandhi set out on a hunger fast, he did so not to solve the problems of his day, but to engage people in the problems of his day. Fasting was no solution. Fasting aimed to provoke questions, involvement, and responsibility.

Similarly, if the task of the middle manager as leader is to mobilize the resources of the group (superiors, subordinates, lateral colleagues, the press, outside parties) to do work (come to terms with problematic situations), then the task will generally consist of capturing and directing attention to the problem situation, containing the stress and frustration that inevitably come from facing tough situations, corraling the various constituents into working relationships with one another, and managing that work process (defining, refining, and resolving problems) over time. A leader becomes a guide, interpreter, and stimulus of engagement, rather than a source of answers.

This kind of leadership isn't easy. Particularly in group settings, people develop ingenious patterns for avoiding work. These patterns



composing it . . . a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes—will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.<sup>15</sup>

### Leadership and Public Problem Solving as Group Phenomena

No situation can be described, *a priori*, as a problem. Situations seem problematic because people value one state of affairs over another. People would rather not be poor, for example, so joblessness is deemed a problem. In the public realm, the kinds of situations we define as problematic often change. For example, inequality of opportunity is defined as a problem today, but at times in the past it was simply a generally accepted condition sustained by a set of prevailing understandings.

Work on any large-scale problem situation may be impossible without first shifting the prevailing understanding so that the situation is seen as problematic. Advocates of various public concerns and causes often serve this function by bringing what they think is a problem or opportunity to general attention. In this way, a vision of the future acts as a stimulus, rather than an answer. It is the grain of sand in the oyster, not the pearl.

The work process moves forward as competing frames for the problem are carved out from the overall problematic landscape. This process will require that the various components of the relevant community, each representing a different perspective on the problem situation, engage one another. Ways to test the parameters of the situation must be developed and implemented. Problems have to be distinguished from conditions. As suggested before, problems are those aspects of a situation that potentially can be resolved, while conditions are those aspects that are probably unchangeable. To fail in this distinction is usually to mistake illusion for reality. For example, in U.S.-Soviet relations, each nation's vulnerability to the other's weapons (nuclear, chemical, biological) is a condition central to a problematic situation. Although many might like to view this condition as the crux of the problem and then imagine a technical Type I cure for it—a perfect "Star Wars" defense, for example—such a vision denies essential aspects of reality. Few people actually suppose that we can make ourselves invulnerable, not only to nuclear weapons, but to biological and chemical weapons as well. Defining "mutual vulnerabil-



In the conventional wisdom, effective political leadership is defined as the capacity to achieve one's declared goals, to get one's program enacted. The emphasis is not only on having a program one can call one's own, but on being able to manage one's influence to achieve it.<sup>14</sup> This perspective, even in what appear to be Type I situations, may be a trap for those in authority who want to exercise leadership. As a simple example, consider the authority figure who thinks he has a solution and whose primary stake is to enact a specific policy—say a president who passionately believes in a particular energy policy. As Kellerman describes in *The Political Presidency*, the primary requirement for success, even here, will be the president's capacity to engage the relevant community of interests (Congress, press, interest groups, public, cabinet) in the work of facing, assessing, and creating terms for resolving the problematic situation. This leadership process demands continuous engagement and intent listening so that the president can include in his definition of the problem and its policy solutions as much of the political landscape as he can. Getting a program enacted will require incorporating the various points of view represented in the community of interests—a process of learning and compromise that will tend to produce a program no longer one's own. Clinging to a specific policy as "one's own" will often lead to failure because it is essentially an apolitical policy formulation and implementation strategy. That is, the work has been conceived as the individual's rather than the group's. The fundamental error lies in dealing with Type II and Type III situations as if they were Type I.

Many leadership theorists and practitioners have fallen into the same trap as have "followers." They identify the primary locus of work with the individual authority rather than with the community of interests that has the problem. Societies that operate according to the conventional wisdom tend to produce "leaders" who perpetuate the mistake of misidentifying the primary locus of work and thus fail to engage the problem-defining and problem-solving resources of the group. Individual efforts remain unintegrated with a systemic solution. John Stuart Mill describes this dynamic.

The mischief begins when, instead of calling forth the activity and powers of individuals and bodies, [a government] substitutes its own activity for theirs; when instead of informing, advising, and upon occasion, denouncing, it makes them work in fetters, or bids them stand aside and does their work instead of them. The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals



people's problems back in their own laps without abandoning them. A leader is likely to encounter plenty of frustration, conflict, and anger as he challenges the community to tolerate the confusion and discomfort of learning. Success will depend on (1) identifying the problem situations that the community indicates are ripe for its attention, (2) determining the composition of the relevant community of interests, (3) designing positions and policies to address the ripe situations so that the relevant community learns its way to a solution, and (4) implementing and assessing actions according to their effects on the community's work process.

Franklin Roosevelt's management of leadership illustrates this expertise quite well. Especially before the 1937 court-packing fiasco, Roosevelt routinely left the various communities of interest in confusion until policy directions emerged from their struggle with their uncertainty, values, and doubt.

Situations had to be permitted to develop, to crystallize, to clarify; the competing forces had to vindicate themselves in the actual pull and tug of conflict; public opinion had to face the question, consider it, pronounce upon it—only then, at the long frazzled end, would the President's intuitions consolidate and precipitate a result.<sup>16</sup>

For example, during the depth of the Depression, rather than establish an official economic policy, Roosevelt avoided becoming attached to any particular strategy, economic theory, or solution. Of course, he had his own preferences. The point, however, was not primarily to implement his preferences. The point was to track the trends in the group for clues to the issues that were ripe for its attention and for which he could use his formal authority and personal power to provoke its work. Roosevelt's expertise did not lie in inventing solutions and implementing them, but in improvising temporary catalysts of work in the form of policies and positions, depending on the way the work was progressing, or being avoided, in the group at the time.

Yet Roosevelt saw himself in a favorite simile as a quarterback in a football game. He could not say what the play after next was going to be until the next play was completed. "If the play makes ten yards," he told a press conference in April 1933, "the succeeding play will be different from what it would have been if they had been thrown for a loss. I think that's the easiest way to explain it." And, from his point of view, the Frankfurters and the Tugwells, the



ity" as a problem rather than a condition is thus inaccurate. Alternative problem definitions are: improving security within the condition of mutual vulnerability by improving U.S.-Soviet relations, crisis prevention and management, strengthening deterrence through arms control, diminishing the displacement of Third World tensions into the U.S.-Soviet relationship, and so forth. To produce work, a vision needs to be rooted in reality; it has to have accuracy, and not simply imagination and appeal.

Most situations policy makers face involve a multitude of related problems at varying stages of definition and development. Some facets of the situation are just beginning to be perceived by the community as problematic, others have long been seen as problems but remain unsolved and appear unremitting, while perhaps a few problems are near resolution. A policy to address one problem will often affect not only the way other problems are defined but also the resources available to address them. As time passes, work in one problem area may stimulate insights that lead to problem redefinition in other areas, and in turn to changes in policy and resource allocation. Indeed, since situations and resources are overlapping, many such insights may be possible. For example, our investigation of the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* should yield insight into the mismanagement of organizations in general, not just the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Furthermore, we may discover something about the impact of rapid privatization on the management systems of public agencies and the danger of seeing such a policy as a mechanical cure-all for the ills of government, society, and other nations. Although the privatization of public bus systems may constitute good policy in some cities, pushing NASA to act like a profit-making business with rigid production deadlines evidently was not.

In this complex and somewhat fluid environment, the public official is faced with the challenge of managing the discovery, shaping, and rediscovery of each step in the problem-defining and -solving process over time. He must be able to lead the relevant community of interests in facing unwanted situations, investigating what can be changed and what cannot, discovering what it is willing to define as a problem, applying insights from other areas, and fashioning the life adjustments that will constitute the material of any solution.

This expertise operates on a razor's edge. An expert at leadership has to manage the means, pace, authority structures, and other devices for containing and focusing the usually turbulent process of putting



war. Rather than telling the people what they want to hear, leadership involves telling the people over time what they need to hear to get them to face and solve their problems.

In managing the identification and resolution of difficult issues, a leader will be managing community processes of learning: assessing current situations, questioning previous assumptions, learning the different points of view embodied by opposing interests, inventing frames for defining problems that take in a sufficient breadth of those interests, implementing solutions by adjusting actions and attitudes as a community, and redefining problems and solutions as the situation changes and as various points of view change. Each of these tasks consists of learning.

Learning processes may be more successful in the long run than seductively narrow problem definitions and easily administered technical solutions. But learning is difficult, conflictive, and takes time. "Learning its way there" may also be the only way a society progresses from one level of success to another. Schlesinger describes Roosevelt's presidency this way: "If politics was essentially an educational process, deeds, of course, were the most important teacher. The New Deal itself became a great schoolhouse, compelling Americans to a greater knowledge of their country and its problems."<sup>18</sup>

Learning processes are difficult to gauge. The bottom line may be long in coming. Perhaps the best index a leader may have to gauge his success in the short run is simply the extent to which the community is thinking in the direction of its work. As Roosevelt wrote to H.G. Wells in 1935, "I believe our biggest success is making people think during these past two years. They may not think straight but they are thinking in the right direction."<sup>19</sup>

## Democracy

Democracy is often seen as a means to protect individual and inalienable rights and freedom. From the perspective outlined in this chapter, however, democracy appears to be a system for turning the work of the community back over to the community. As suggested by others in this volume, these two ideas of democracy may be complementary.

Thus democracy is not primarily a political structure, but a shared set of attitudes by which the community itself takes responsibility for work rather than pushing the work onto the shoulders of its authorities. Democracy might flourish within many kinds of political



Johnsons and the Hulls represented alternative plays, not alternative strategies. Each ideological system, as he must have felt it, described certain aspects of American reality, each missed out on certain vital features, and effectiveness might therefore most probably lie not in taking one or the other but in combining and applying both to meet the needs of a particular situation.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes, for purely tactical reasons, a leader will indeed take clear stands or put his full weight behind a specific policy. Taking such a position, even if it does not conform to his personal values and program, may serve as a heuristic device to stimulate and guide the conflictive and deliberative work of problem defining and problem solving. Stands and policies are thus designed both to generate work and to test the waters (i.e., gather more information). Based upon his analysis of how and which issues are ripening in the relevant community, a leader may well shift his weight or change his stance over time. For example, to prevent premature closure on an argument when the point of view represented by the weakening side is not being faced by the larger community of interests, a leader might find ways to reinforce the weaker side, even if he himself is ideologically opposed to it, so as to keep the process sufficiently fluid for the work to continue. In this regard, a leader is like a midwife trying to keep the mother from pushing the baby out too soon.

A leader may have to gauge, interpret, and manage not only which situations or issues are ripe for attention, but also the vicissitudes any hard work is bound to encounter. As suggested earlier, when the work itself requires that the community wrestle with its conflicting points of view, there are bound to be many diversions and other mechanisms of work avoidance.

Chief among these mechanisms is the penchant for looking to the person in authority for answers. Thus to exercise leadership, the authority figure may have to pace the rate at which he fails the demand for answers, perhaps very slowly. He may have a "honeymoon period," but if he does not act carefully in giving the work back to the group at a rate it can manage, the community in its frustration may well scapegoat its authority figure by pulling him down and replacing him—all in the belief that "if only we had the right leader our problems would be solved."

Alternatively, the community may avoid taking responsibility for a difficult situation by defining the problem so narrowly that it appears amenable to a technical solution. Or the community and its authorities may create a diversion by producing a new situation—for example, a



- Which political structures might be appropriate for promoting democracy as a value system and in which settings?
- What knowledge and training would a leader need?



structures (such as monarchy or socialism) as long as the community effectively takes responsibility for work. Conversely, efforts to institute a democratic political structure in a community that does not take responsibility for its own work will not necessarily produce democracy. Eugene Debs went to the heart of this distinction: "Too long have the workers of the world waited for some Moses to lead them out of bondage. He has not come; he will never come. I would not lead you out if I could; for if you could be led out, you could be led back again."<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps democracy as a political structure owes its success as a problem-defining and problem-solving apparatus not simply to the morality of protecting and distributing "rights and privileges," but to its capacity, within a group structure and as a community set of attitudes, to distribute the responsibility for work in the only place where the work can be done.

### Further Inquiry

The alternative conception of leadership and public policy suggested in this chapter and by this volume will require more analysis and testing. Readers will undoubtedly find they have many important and unresolved questions. In the spirit of the ideas presented here, we have intended to stimulate thinking on such questions, not to answer them definitively. These questions might include:

- How can one analyze the trends in a society to gauge when an issue is ripe for the group's attention?
- Is the current "crisis in leadership" a sign of growing frustration with complex situations, evidence of a work-avoidance mechanism, or an indication that work is getting done?
- What interpretive frameworks can be used to help communities define and solve the problems they face?
- How does one exercise leadership at times of crisis, when there is apparently little or no time to shift the locus of work back to the relevant community?
- What is the difference between policy designed as a heuristic device and policy designed as a solution?
- What are the implications of this concept of leadership for developing political strategy and tactics to get work done?



## Chapter Eight: Political Leadership: Managing the Public's Problem Solving

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1. Quoted in William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), pp. 178-79.
2. In his forthcoming *Leadership: A Seventh View*, Robert Terry of the University of Minnesota classifies the various views of leadership into six categories: (1) the trait approach, in which leaders are thought to be born with innate qualities; (2) the situational approach, in which leaders with different characteristics are thought to arise out of different situations depending on the needs of the moment; (3) organizational theory, in which leadership consists of serving specific functions that differ depending on one's position in an organization; (4) power theory, in which leadership consists of the successful management of power and authority to achieve one's aims; (5) vision theory, in which leadership consists of defining vision and effectively communicating vision to achieve political or organizational alignment; and (6) assessed vision theory, in which leadership consists of defining and communicating vision, and the ends themselves are assessed according to a framework of ethics or values. Though the differences among these approaches are of major import, so are the similarities. All these theories share certain basic assumptions, forming a paradigm of leadership that (1) equates leadership with formal or informal authority and (2) gives the leader the role of providing a vision or agenda.
3. Barbara Kellerman, *The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership from Kennedy to Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. xi.
4. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 20, 139.
5. Robert A. Portnoy, *Leadership, What Every Leader Should Know About People* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 4.
6. For example, many civic groups, such as local chambers of commerce, are now producing programs to train up-and-coming community members in leadership. These programs include Leadership Minneapolis, Leadership Dallas, Leadership Cleveland, Leadership Chattanooga, Leadership Atlanta, and Leadership Philadelphia.
7. I Samuel 8:19-20.
8. See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine, 1972); or Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins* (New York: Dutton, 1977).



11. Carol Weiss, "Research for Policy's Sake: The Enlightenment Function of Social Research," *Policy Analysis* 3 (Fall 1977): 533.
12. Edmund Whittaker, *From Euclid to Eddington: A Study of Conceptions of the External World* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p. 69.
13. Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966).
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16. Talcott Parsons, *Societies—Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966).
17. Peter Blau, *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 38.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
19. Walsh McDermott, "Evaluating the Physician and His Technology," in John H. Knowles, ed., *Doing Better and Feeling Worse* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), pp. 135-57.
20. David K. Cohen and Richard J. Murnane, "Merit Pay and the Evaluation Problem; Why Some Merit Pay Plans Fail and a Few Survive," *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (February 1986): 1-17.
21. William G. Ouchi, "The Relationship Between Organizational Structure and Organizational Control," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 22 (March 1977): 95-113.
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23. Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. xi.
24. Anderson, "Place of Principles," p. 714.
25. Richard A. Wasserstrom, *The Judicial Decision* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961).
26. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: NLB, 1975), p. 52 (Feyerabend's italics).
27. Armen A. Alchian and W.R. Allen, *University Economics* (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1974), p. 211.
28. George Stigler, *Essays in the History of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 5.
29. Walter W. Heller, *New Dimensions of Political Economy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), p. 27.
30. D.E. Moggridge, *Keynes* (London: Fontana Books, 1976), p. 120.



5. Jim Varanese, "Case Study of Candidates in the Democratic Primary Race for the Massachusetts State Senate Seat in the Belmont-Watertown-Cambridge-Allston-Brighton District," April 1986. This paper was written as an independent study project at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.
6. Benjamin M. Compaine, *Who Owns the Media?* (New York: Harmony Books, 1979), p. 18.
7. For a rich discussion of the decline of multiple-newspaper towns and the consolidation of ownership, see Ben Badgikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).
8. Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message," chap. 1 in *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964).
9. Martin Linsky, *Television and the Presidential Elections* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1938), p. 14.
10. In certain other situations short of these extremes, news organizations seem to have assessed the consequences of publication and decided against publishing. However, such situations, are hard to distinguish on the basis of journalistic principle from many cases where such considerations are ignored. For instance, news organizations have recently decided overwhelmingly to protect the privacy of complainants in rape prosecutions by not publishing their names. This practice seems to reflect the recent increased sensitivity to sexual discrimination and women's rights, and the intimate nature of the crime. However, victims of other violent crimes, who may also feel deeply humiliated and exposed, are not generally accorded the same consideration.
11. Report of the Massachusetts Task Force on Organ Transplantation (October 1984). See also George Annis, "Regulating Heart and Liver Transplantation," and Marc Roberts, "The Economics of Organ Transplants," both in *Jurimetrics* 25 (Spring 1985).
12. William Greider, *The Education of David Stockman and Other Americans* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1981).
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14. For more on the history of objectivity in the press, see Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
15. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1922).
16. *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1986, p. 14.
17. Martin Linsky and Deni Elliott, "The Oliver Sipple Story," *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, September 1982.
18. For the origins of this quotation, see Chalmers Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First Hundred Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1977).
19. The best account of this episode is in David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1973).
20. T.R. Reid, *Congressional Odyssey: The Saga of a Senate Bill* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1980).
21. Conversation with Haynes Johnson, June 16, 1986.

9. See Plato, *The Republic*, or, for modern efforts along these lines, Bernard Bass, *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1981).
10. See Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1980); Kellerman, *Political Presidency*; Edwin Hollander, *Leadership Dynamics: A Practical Guide to Effective Relationships* (New York: Free Press, 1978); Bennis and Nanus, *Leaders: Associates*, The Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, *Leadership in Organizations* (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1981); or Paul Hershey, *The Situational Leader* (New York: Warner, 1984).
11. See A. Kenneth Rice, *Learning for Leadership* (London: Tavistock, 1965), or Arthur D. Colman and W. Harold Bexton, eds., *Group Relations Reader* (Washington, DC: A.K. Rice Institute, 1975).
12. Neustadt, *Presidential Power*.
13. This argument departs from Plato's notion that the expertise required of the leader is a vision of the absolute good. Plato's use of the physician analogy is well taken as an argument in favor of the need for expertise, but he apparently misunderstands the kind of expertise required. He fails to appreciate the medical difference between Type I situations and types II and III. Consequently he suggests that the expertise required is essentially of the answer-giving variety. See Plato's *Protagoras*, *Giorgias*, or *The Republic* for his extensive use of helmsman and physician analogies; also Renford Bambrough, "Plato's Political Analogies," in Peter Laslett, ed., *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, 1st ser. (Oxford: Blackwell/Oxford University Press, 1956).
14. See Kellerman, *The Political Presidency*.
15. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859; reprint, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), pp. 140-41.
16. Arthur Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 528.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 558.
19. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 558.
20. Cited by Mark E. Kann, "Challenging Lockean Liberalism in America: The Case of Debs and Hillquit," *Political Theory* 8 (May 1980): 214.

## Chapter Nine: The Media and Public Deliberation

1. James Reston, *New York Times*, April 9, 1986, p. A27.
2. A three-year study of how the press affects federal policy making, which I directed, found that successful high-level policy makers often use the press to communicate with the rest of government; moreover, most senior officials use the media to find out what is going on in the government generally and in their own policy area. The findings of this study are included in Martin Linsky, *Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986).
3. Conversation with the author.
4. Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc. 1979), chap. 5.



*Introductory Essay*

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**Social Research and Educational Change**

**Knowledge for Policy:  
Improving Education  
through Research**

*Edited by*

**Don S. Anderson and Bruce J. Biddle**

## *Acknowledgments*

### *Routledge*

THOMAS, P. (1985). *The Aims and Outcomes of Social Policy Research* (pp. 97–114). London: Croom Helm [Chapter 19].

### *Sage*

ALKIN, M.C., DALLAK, R., and WHITE, P. (1979). *Using Evaluations: Does Evaluation Make a Difference?* (pp. 223–261). Beverly Hills,





natural sciences is thought to be generated by curiosity alone. In contrast many persons assume that social research as we have defined it should be for improving the human condition and be driven by both curiosity and practical goals.

Our second limitation concerns the decision to focus this book on *education*. This decision was made for several reasons: social research has differing effects in different institutions, the two of us are familiar with education, education is important, and a large literature on social research impact in education is already available. Nevertheless, the decision to focus on education means that this book centres on the effects of social research within a specific institutional context.

By comparison with other institutions, education in most countries: is massive in size, is largely supported by public funds, has a sizeable bureaucracy, serves a vulnerable client population, has low professional status, has complex and often contradictory goals, has diffuse effects which are hard to assess, and is often politicized. These features tend to generate a unique arena for social research impact. To illustrate, education has a large number of interest groups (or 'stakeholders') who are involved in setting its policies and procedures. These interest groups include, at a minimum: *politicians, administrators in governments, policy advisors in governments, district and school administrators, teachers, teachers' unions, parents, school boards, citizen groups representing specific interests, teacher educators, educational researchers, industries with needs for trained employees, foundations and vendors pushing educational innovations, and (lest we forget) pupils*. Educational systems differ in the ways in which they accommodate the interests of these various groups and in their procedures for making policy, and each of these groups may have needs for access to social research knowledge.

To take another illustration, modern educational systems are subject to repeated calls for change or 'reform'. Most of these calls reflect the interests of specific groups, most calls involve assumptions about the potential effects of innovations, and in most cases those assumptions are not backed by research. (To illustrate, reformers of the past few years have urged such innovations as a career-ladder system for teachers' salaries or a longer school year. It is argued that such innovations will generate higher levels of pupil achievement, but little research has yet appeared that would support such arguments.) In short, the 'radical' notion of supporting calls for educational reform with research knowledge seems not yet popular among many reformers.

One might think this a problem, but evidence also suggests that over the years most calls for reform have had but little effect on educational practice (see Elmore and McLaughlin, 1988; Cuban, 1990). This does not mean that education is static. On the contrary, it clearly evolves in response to ideological and bureaucratic pressures and is occasionally swept by fads — some, like open learning or programmed instruction,

different stances, however, and in this introductory essay we provide a framework for understanding their insights

Before addressing this topic, we should say what we mean by social research, and why our coverage is mainly about education. The terms research and social science are used in many ways. Dictionaries give both a broad and a narrow meaning for 'research'. In its broad sense, research denotes any investigatory activity, thus it might include (among other things) philosophical inquiry, textual exegesis, or self-exploration via meditation. Although this broad meaning is useful elsewhere, we choose in this book to stress the narrower sense in which research is used to denote disciplined empirical investigation or inquiries which gather and interpret evidence.

Similarly, 'social' research can be conceived to apply to all disciplines that concern themselves with the affairs of interacting beings including (among others) the fields of law, archaeology, and ethology. Although these uses may also be needed in other contexts, we choose here to restrict usage to the core social disciplines whose research has had the greatest impact on education — social psychology; sociology; anthropology, and occasionally history, political science, and economics.

When we speak of *social research*, then, we have in mind the empirical investigations characteristic of the core social sciences. Although restrictive, this definition still covers a lot of territory. It includes — for example — experiments with human subjects, social surveys, observational research; ethnographic studies; public-opinion polls; analyses of census and other records assembled by governments; historical research with archival documents; studies that are commissioned by private-interest groups; basic, applied, and evaluation research; inexpensive research that is conducted by isolated scholars or educators; complex studies with huge samples and massive funding; and intensive research on but a single person or social context.

Social research is now a large and costly enterprise in industrialized countries. It is sponsored from many sources: the private sector, through grants from foundations, governments, or public authorities, and the salaries of university faculty who both teach and do research. Most expensive social research is supported through grants and contracts from governments, and this, as we shall see, can be the tail that wags the research dog, influencing the questions that are asked and the methods that are used. Grant and contract support must compete with other legitimate needs for tax dollars, and much of it is awarded with the expectation that social research will contribute to social betterment (as defined by the sponsor), preferably in the short run. But, whatever the funding source, much social research is widely assumed to be for 'improving' social life. In this regard, social research is seen differently from a good deal of research in the natural sciences, say astronomy or physics. All forms of disciplined research are thought to generate knowledge, but much of research in the



been tepid, and advocacy groups such as the Committee on Basic Research in the Behavioral and Social Sciences [R.M. Adams, N.J. Smelser and D.J. Treiman, Chapter 2], have often felt a need to argue that "Federal investment in basic research in the behavioral and social sciences ... is an investment in the future welfare of the nation."

Doubts about the value of social research efforts have been particularly strong in education. In part, this scepticism may have been fuelled by exaggerated claims for research effects. To illustrate, Patricia Graham, at that time Director of the National Institute of Education in Washington, stated that "As an intrinsic part of all our research and development programs, we will find ways to eliminate the effect of a student's race, culture, or income on the quality of education received and on the achievement level attained" (*ASA Footnotes*, 1978). But such uncritical enthusiasm had, by the end of the 1970s, been largely replaced by pessimism. Thus, a prominent researcher in the United States has recently asked:

Is the vast majority of the variance in educational effectiveness inexplicable in terms of the influences that we can currently measure and control? Is it likely to remain so for at least the span of our professional lives? ... Should our empirical policy studies be based on the assumption that the conditions that make schooling effective are either in practice unknown, unmeasurable, too numerous, or too labile to be controlled by persons at any significant distance from the essential nexus of learning, namely a pupil's brain and a tutor? I am inclined to believe that the answer to each of these questions is "yes". (Glass, 1979)

Within Britain, the Permanent Secretary to the Department of Education and Science declared:

I have to say, of course, that the great thing about research is that a part of it is rubbish and another part ... leads nowhere and is really indifferent; it is, I am afraid, exceptional to find a piece of research that really hits the nail on the head and tells you pretty clearly what is wrong or what is happening or what should be done.... People say they have done some research when they really mean they have stopped to think for three minutes. (Pile, 1976)

And a former university professor, in 1988 an Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of Education, complained:

To put it simply, our labors haven't produced enough findings that Americans can use or even see the use of. Over the past two



masquerading as research-generated innovations. However, educational systems generally seem to have a robust capacity for resisting pressures for change. More than one study has shown that policy decisions by educational leaders have but little impact within schools (see, for example, Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage, 1982). But this also suggests that the deck might be stacked against those who seek evidence for the impact of social research in education. (If educational systems successfully resist other pressures for change, why should they not also resist research-generated pressures?) Nevertheless, evidence of research impact in education is abundant — indeed, the selections we have chosen for this book provide many examples of such effects.

Nevertheless, controversies have also erupted concerning the nature of research on education, and educational research has also come under attack for its presumed lack of relevance. Why have such controversies and attacks arisen?

### Enthusiasms and Denigrations

Industrialized civilizations value and support research in the natural sciences because of its perceived benefits and despite its destructive potentials. Support is also sometimes extended to research in the social domain. National governments collect massive census and economic data in the hope that they will be useful. Social research was argued as an aid for social planning by advocates ranging from Adam Smith to Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, the Fabians, and the American Pragmatists. Recent enthusiasm for social research can be traced to World War II and its aftermath, however. Large-scale investigations of propaganda, morale, and individual abilities had been useful during a time of war, and social research came to be regarded as an essential part of postwar social reconstruction. Thus Dorwin Cartwright, writing in 1949, could assert that "In the acute social crisis of our time many people are turning to social science for the solution of our social problems" [Chapter 1].

Nevertheless, support for social research remains a minute fraction of that for the natural sciences. Within the United States, support for social research on 'practical' problems appeared in various agencies in the 1940s and 1950s, but funding for 'basic' social research was not authorized in the National Science Foundation until 1960. Similarly, within Australia, support appeared first for research in the physical and biological sciences, but in the early 1950s the federal government established a major facility for natural and social research, now known as the Institute for Advanced Studies, charged with investigating subjects of importance to the nation. Systematic support for social research was not formalized in Britain until 1966, when it was established under the aegis of the Social Science Research Council. Despite these advances, support for social research has



findings about the effects of teacher behaviour on pupil achievement and that this information can be applied in ways which will inevitably improve classroom teaching.

To say the least, this model seems inappropriate for thinking about social research and its effects (see Biddle, 1987). It implies a naive view of the research process and ignores the various forms of knowledge that social research can generate. It also assumes that social research knowledge is always made available to users and that those users inevitably employ that knowledge in ways that improve the social scene. And it assumes that the field of application is politically sterile — devoid of value alternatives, the wheeling and dealing of interest groups, and the multitudinous trade-offs which characterize action in real life situations. It is widely espoused, however, and disenchantment seems to appear when the expectations it engenders are not fulfilled. If this 'simple' model is misleading, what might a more realistic model look like?

### Conceptions of Social Research

We begin with the social research process. How should social research be conceived, how does it generate knowledge, and what is the nature of that knowledge?

Traditional or positivist answers to these questions are based on models for social research which are concerned with quantitative measurement, deductive reasoning, and causal relations among variables. As outlined by Fred N. Kerlinger [Chapter 8], social research is seen as similar to one version of research procedures in the natural sciences. Like them, it conducts disciplined enquiries in the real world, thus generates knowledge which is more valid than knowledge based on ideology, hearsay, superstitions, intuitions, or limited personal experience. And like them, it is based on the canons of objectivity and empiricism, explores event occurrences through surveys, and confirms causal relations by means of manipulative experiments which enable events to be predicted.

The model as outlined by Kerlinger is popular among psychologists but places limits on one's realm of study, particularly when experimentation is involved. After all, one normally cannot manipulate gender, social class, or the ethnicity of a pupil's family in experiments, yet these factors contribute to variation in pupil school achievement. Concern about this problem is widespread, and some sociologists of positivistic bent argue that causal conclusions about nonmanipulatable variables are justified when theory generates models involving such variables and those models are, in turn, supported with evidence using statistical controls (see Heiss, 1975; or James, Mulaik, and Brett, 1982 — also see Biddle, Slavings, and Anderson, 1985; and Marini and Singer, 1988 for recent reviews of causality issues).



decades, there has been a goodly amount of systematic inquiry and a flood of studies, reports, and recommendations, yet our education system has by many measures worsened. [Chester E. Finn, Jr., Chapter 3]

Moreover, these doubts have been accompanied by a downturn in government support for social (and educational) research accompanied — at least in the United States and Britain — by some vitriolic rhetoric.

What lies behind these negative attitudes towards the usefulness of social research? A surprising range of answers has been proposed for this question. Perhaps the simplest answer is that some social (and particularly educational) research is flabby, weak, poorly conceived, or inappropriate for solving social problems [Finn, Chapter 3]. A more sophisticated answer sees social research as often associated with social reform efforts involving intervention in the public sector, hence to be an anathema to conservative governments [Thomas D. Cook, Chapter 4]. Furthermore, advocates and ideologues already 'know' the proper solutions for human problems, and for them research is irrelevant, except perhaps to legitimate predetermined opinions. Other answers are associated with inherent problems within social research [Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., Chapter 5]; recent attacks upon 'positivism' among social researchers [Cook, Chapter 4]; and inadequate support for sustained social research efforts [Richard Shavelson and David Berliner, Chapter 7]. And still another is based on the observation that social researchers and users live in separate worlds that are difficult to link [Henry M. Levin, Chapter 6]. (In brief, the researchers' world is slower paced and tends to be focused on the complex details of research methods, findings, and interpretations. In contrast, the user lives in a world of practical demands and conflicts — where decisions must often be made quickly, whether or not research has anything to say about the topic.)

In the final analysis, however, it appears that doubts about social research are based more on hearsay than reality. Evidence abounds that social research has substantial impact, and summaries of some of its effects within education appear in many of the essays reprinted in this book. To paraphrase Mark Twain, current rumours about the ineffectiveness of social research seem to be grossly exaggerated. Why have such rumours appeared, and why are they so widely believed?

In this essay we argue that such rumours are based, in part, on misunderstandings about the nature of social research and the ways in which its knowledge can affect institutions such as education. In brief, a good deal of mischief has been created by a 'simple' model for research impact which has it that social research generates facts — i.e., definitive 'findings' or 'results' — and that such facts enable users to make unfettered decisions which will improve social life. To illustrate, some enthusiasts have thought that research on teaching can generate definitive



effects of applied research is taken up in greater detail by David K. Cohen and Michael S. Garet [Chapter 11] who discuss both the shifting social contexts of policy making and some of the inherent problems of applied research. Their argument suggests that governments fund applied studies assuming that such studies will generate 'definitive' knowledge needed for making specific decisions, but that such assumptions are unrealistic. Instead, Cohen and Garet urge that applied research be considered a form of 'social discourse' in which policy makers and researchers interact to generate potentially useful knowledge.

Cohen and Garet raise questions about the image of applied research, but other authors have challenged the basic tenets of the positivist model. As we learned from Cook [Chapter 4], various questions have been raised by social researchers themselves about the traditional image of their craft. Some of these questions concern problems inherent in the study of social events. For example, Blalock [in Chapter 5] suggests that, unlike much research in the natural sciences, social research is plagued by serious measurement problems, social events are often affected by many variables and tend to change rapidly, determinants of social behaviour may differ when one goes from context to context, the boundaries of social events are often fuzzy and imprecise, and the collection of social data is often expensive which means that researchers are dependent on governments or other powerful agents for funds or are forced into doing trivial research.

These problems challenge positivist social research. If, for example, the determinants of social behaviour often differ from context to context, then one cannot be sure that the results from one survey or experiment will generalize to another context not yet studied. (Techniques found to improve pupil achievement in a public school, for example, may or may not 'work' in a parochial school.) This does not mean that all social effects are context-bound. Some may be sharply bound while others may generalize widely, but we will not know which effects will and will not generalize until we have studied them in various contexts. In fairness, thoughtful positivists, such as Kerlinger, are concerned about this challenge. But too often social researchers and policy advisors write as if they believe that the results of a single study will generalize indefinitely, across space and time.

The challenges posed by Blalock are serious, but there are worse. As Cook suggests [Chapter 4], some positivists appear to assume that the findings of social research speak for themselves, but this is nonsense. Empirical findings never stand alone but are always embedded within an interpretive context (or 'paradigm') which makes assumptions about concepts, operations, and analytic tools. This issue is also contentious for the physical sciences (see Kuhn, 1962) but is writ large in social research where value commitments seem inevitably to intrude in the decisions of the researcher or patron who funds the research. The wise social researcher acknowledges these commitments and plans activities to minimize their effects. But unfortunately, as Selleck reminds us [in Chapter



Kerlinger also makes the point that social research leads to *theoretical* knowledge, and even though its theoretical insights are never ultimately 'proven', the basic purpose for conducting research is to gain those insights. Like most positivists, Kerlinger also argues that social research 'tests' but does not 'generate' theory, thus stressing deductive rather than inductive reasoning. These arguments may be traced to the influence of key figures in the history of philosophy, notably the Logical Positivists and Karl Popper, but they leave open questions about where theories come from and they are discovered (which does not mean that quantitative research on scientific discovery is impossible to conduct, see Langley, Simon, Bradshaw, and Zytow, 1987).

In addition, Kerlinger argues for a distinction that is now widely used among social researchers — that between *basic* and *applied* research. In general, basic research is thought to be driven by theory, to reflect the questions of researchers, and to generate 'conclusions', whereas applied research starts with practical concerns, reflects the needs of knowledge users, and generates 'decisions'. We have some reservations about the depth of this distinction (see Anderson, 1987), but it has been around for at least 50 years [see Chapter 1] and also appears in the natural sciences where basic and applied research are often regarded as being fundamentally different. Moreover, funding procedures for basic and applied research are often assigned to different governmental agencies, with preference going to the latter because early pay-off seems more likely.

Given this distinction, it is reasonable to examine both basic and applied research as models for the generation of useful knowledge. The case for basic research is made by J.W. Getzels [Chapter 9] who argues that practical knowledge ultimately devolves from theoretical insights which are best generated by basic investigations. Getzels also provides examples of basic research impact in education and suggests that such impact stems not only from the generation of empirical information through research but also from the concepts, explanations, or ways of thinking ('paradigms') about social events which basic social research evolves. Indeed, if we take Getzels seriously, basic research probably has *more* potential for influencing education than applied research — although it may not be focused on specific questions that governments or educators want answered in the near future.

In contrast, the case for applied research is made by James S. Coleman [Chapter 10] who argues that, whereas basic studies are largely designed to generate journal publications for the researcher, applied studies are more often focused on issues relevant to potential users. Coleman also describes applied studies which have affected education although he observes that those effects were not always the ones intended by the researchers and those who funded the research. In fact, Coleman wonders why so much applied research is "not used by those in positions of policy, but [is] left to gather dust on a shelf." This complaint about the actual



of positivism can be quite insensitive to the problems inherent in their models and oblivious of the advantages of alternative models. We do not choose to take sides in this debate. Instead, we suggest that there are legitimate cases to be made for various and diverse strategies for social research which will depend on one's purposes. Alternative methods shine when they generate insights about the dynamics of social contexts with which we were not familiar. Positivistic research sparkles when it tests crisp theories with persuasive empirical evidence. No one approach has an exclusive mandate for generating knowledge that either satisfies human curiosity or is useful for those whose job is to get things done as effectively as possible.

How then is one to conceive the knowledge types that social research generates? Answers to this question should reflect several ideas from the above paragraphs. For one, research-generated knowledge consists of insights that are communicated with symbols and are always laid within an interpretive context. This does not mean that such insights are spun out of thin air. On the contrary, good social research also provides evidence for its insights, but its findings only have meaning when they are interpreted within a theoretical paradigm with which we are familiar. For another, various forms of social research generate different types of knowledge, and one should recognize these various types and their potential contributions. And for a third, one should also recognize that the insights generated through social research are fragmentary images, seen through a glass darkly, of an indefinitely complex reality.

Such observations suggest that social research can generate several types of knowledge elements. Among others, these include: *technical concepts* denoting social events; *propositions* about events and their relations; and *explanations* for social processes. To illustrate, recent research on teaching and its effects has generated:

*Technical concepts* for describing classroom teaching — such as Kounin's (1970) concepts of "Momentum", "Withitness", "Group Alerting", and others denoting aspects of classroom management.

*Propositions* about relations between teaching strategies and pupil outcomes — such as those summarized by Slavin (1987) for the effects of ability grouping in American public, primary schools. In brief: self-contained classes grouped by overall ability have few effects; but ability groups for specific subjects (particularly groups that cross grade levels) can increase pupils' achievements.

*Explanations* for observable effects in classrooms — such as those of Brophy and Good (1974) for "The Pygmalion Effect" which denotes inadvertent tendencies among some teachers to treat pupils differently depending on whether they think those pupils are 'bright' or 'dull' [see Chapter 23]. As Brophy and Good note, this effect is a product



25], a lot of well-intentioned social research reflects value commitments that seem not to be recognized by the researcher.

Other critics point out that when social research involves collecting data from sentient beings, the research act becomes a form of social interaction. To the extent that this occurs, the researcher cannot be the 'objective' scientist portrayed in positivist models. Others have suggested that social processes involve interacting and evolving parts, and for such processes the simple concept of A causing B is inappropriate. Again, the tendency of positivists to study variables in isolation from one another leads some critics to observe that the researcher misses important events or fails to perceive the outline of the forest. And the strong insistence on deductive logic in positivist writings is anathema to some critics who view the proper task of social research to be the discovery of inductive insight.

Then there is the problem posed by the fact that the objects of study in the social sciences are self-aware human beings who, despite all constraints, continue to make their own choices. Kenneth J. Gergen [Chapter 12] argues that when knowledge about social events is promulgated, awareness of that knowledge may change those events in the future. (To illustrate, the mere act of alerting teachers to their observable classroom behaviours may cause those behaviours to change — see Good and Brophy, 1974.) Gergen also discusses the fact that many social effects are laid in a temporal context and that those effects tend to change unpredictably over time. He proposes an alternative model which conceives social research as an activity that generates only insights about contemporary social history. This does not mean that social research is useless, of course. A snapshot, diary, or analysis of current affairs is clearly preferable to total ignorance, but these mechanisms lack the panache that we normally associate with research.

Gergen's vision of social research as an activity bound by history is not the only alternative to positivist models. Others are summarized in a model offered by Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln [Chapter 13]. The Guba-Lincoln model, called "Constructivist Inquiry", stresses the problematic character of social research, the need for close contact between researchers and their subjects, the interdependence of social evidence and values, qualitative procedures which do not depend on formal measurement and statistical manipulations, and the inductive discovery of insights which may or may not generalize to contexts not studied. Such a model may be used for portraying the techniques of ethnographic research such as participant observation and exploratory interviewing [see Chapter 15], case-studies [Chapter 19], and some types of evaluation research [Chapter 23].

Those who advance alternative models for social research (particularly advocates of qualitative methods) sometimes feel that they are an embattled minority and, not unlike minorities throughout the ages, can be pretty aggressive in defending their position. At the same time supporters



complex nature of social research impact, and we turn next to this literature.

A convenient starting point is the 'simple' impact model discussed earlier. As was noted, enthusiasm for the 'simple' model seems to be endemic, and examples which portray research impact within education in 'simple' terms appear in Chapters 17 and 23. In effect, the 'simple' model assumes that the user is given timely access to research knowledge which may be applied independently of the context in which knowledge should be interpreted. Moreover, it assumes that the user is an isolated actor, able to reach a decision based only on implications of research knowledge, and implies that the decision made will advantage everyone concerned.

Fortunately, alternative models for conceiving the impact of social research have appeared, and some of these may be found in an essay by Carol Weiss [Chapter 14]. After describing two versions of the 'simple' model, Weiss suggests five other ways for conceiving social research impact: in *interactive* terms, as *political* activity, in *tactical* terms, as a form of *enlightenment*, and as part of the *intellectual enterprise* of the society. Other useful discussions and alternative models may be found in Bulmer (1982), Heller (1986), Husén (1988), Lindblom and Cohen (1979), and Shavelson (1988).

Useful studies of research knowledge impact have also appeared, and we have included reports from two of these in the present volume. In the first, Carol Weiss [Chapter 15] discusses findings from her study of research knowledge use among mental health administrators in the United States. The selection discusses those administrators' answers to questions about whether they had used social research knowledge and whether they sought out that knowledge when making decisions. Responses indicated that impact resulted more often from "accretion" than from a single telling study. Respondents were frequently found to be familiar with aspects of social research knowledge but had difficulty associating that knowledge with any particular studies. And research knowledge was found to have many types of effects on respondents' decisions.

In the second report, Nathan Caplan [Chapter 16] discusses his research with high-level federal bureaucrats in Washington. These federal officials were asked to volunteer instances in which they had used social research knowledge for making decisions. Caplan found that many respondents reported familiarity with social research knowledge, but whether that knowledge was or was not used depended on personal characteristics of respondents, the contexts of decision making, and mechanisms through which respondents were linked to research knowledge. These two studies suggest that only rarely will the findings of a particular study lead to crisp, unambiguous policy decisions.

The reports of Weiss and Caplan were not about education particularly, and systematic studies of research impact in education are hard to find. But lack of evidence has not inhibited discussion of this topic, and several

of unawareness on the part of teachers and can be countered by promoting analytic understanding and a proactive teaching style.

Since concepts, propositions, and explanations are the building blocks of theory, it would also be correct to say (with Kerlinger) that social research generates *theory*. Moreover, it is useful to state that research generates *theory* because this term reminds us of the tentative nature of social research knowledge, helps us to avoid the 'fact' assumption of the simple impact model, and suggests that most research impact comes about because users become aware of theories generated through social research.

But, with all respect to Kerlinger, social research also generates other knowledge elements in addition to theory. These include the *designs and strategies* through which social research is conducted, the *tools* with which social events are measured, and the *evidence* generated about social events and their relations. These latter elements are normally used to support theoretical claims in reports of social research. (Thus, those who report ethnographic research usually provide details about their research contexts, procedures, and evidence for the discoveries they have made, and those who write about experiments explain the design of their studies, the measuring instruments they used, and the statistical significance of their results.) But occasionally these latter knowledge elements are stripped away from the theories with which they were originally associated and can have an impact of their own. To illustrate, IQ tests — a research tool — were originally developed by Alfred Binet for a limited purpose but have since been used for other tasks that would probably have surprised and dismayed their inventor [see Chapter 22].

Various forms of research are associated with the production of different types of knowledge elements. Ethnographic research can generate new concepts about teacher behaviours in classrooms; surveys can generate propositions about events with which teacher behaviours are associated; experiments can test the validity of explanations for effects of teaching. Moreover, each type of knowledge element can potentially affect users. New concepts about teaching can enable an educator, for example, to think about potential problems; new propositions about teaching can suggest ways to solve problems; new explanations for the effects of teaching can suggest why one solution is more likely to work than another.

The research picture, then, is painted from a many-coloured palette. Social research should be thought of as an enterprise which produces numerous types of knowledge. Moreover, these knowledge types may have many uses for educators, depending on their purposes.

### Knowledge Generation and Knowledge Impact

The fact that research knowledge can influence practice does not mean that it has simple effects. Many authors have been intrigued by the



the user in debased forms. Sometimes the user may know that a concept or proposition was generated through research but may not understand the theoretical context or limited empirical support associated with that element. On other occasions, the user may learn about a 'good idea' but not know that the idea was generated through research. And sometimes the user may assume that an innovative notion was research-generated, but no associated research has yet been reported or, worse, available research knowledge tends to contradict the usefulness of that innovation. All of which says that informal dispersal of social research knowledge is dicey.

The disadvantages of informal knowledge dispersal are widely understood, and many support agencies now take formal actions to disseminate the social research knowledge they have funded. Sometimes those actions involve media 'events', sometimes they involve publishing and distributing reports of research, sometimes they involve presentations of research results in seminars, workshops, and training sessions for potential users. Dissemination is big business, and many support agencies spend large portions of their budgets on dissemination (rather than in funding social research). Underlying these efforts seems to be the thesis that users will benefit if only they are provided the 'good news' that research has generated. Moreover, this thesis had a venerable heritage in the Enlightenment. (James Madison argued that "knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.") Unfortunately, the thesis, at least in its simple version, is questionable — how are users to resolve conflicting messages flooding in from competing dissemination efforts? Jack Knott and Aaron Wildavsky [Chapter 18] explore the conditions when dissemination probably does and does not work and suggest conditions that affect dissemination and its impact.

How else might one promote the indirect linking of researchers and users in education? We know of several techniques that address this need. One appears in the form of *SET*, the semi-annual packet of selected research results and reviews that are written specifically for educators and policy makers by officials of the Australian Council for Educational Research and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. *SET* has a large subscription list in the two countries where it is prepared and forms a major vehicle through which potential users are alerted to significant social research knowledge.

A second technique is the employment of persons to review and summarize research pertinent to specific decisions of interest to policy makers. The concept of a 'knowledge broker' or policy analyst is new in Western societies, but already sufficient demand exists for such persons that training programs have appeared. A useful discussion of this role may be found in Trow (1984).

In addition, researchers themselves can assume active roles which



strategies have been proposed for improving research usage. Most assume that researchers and users inhabit different cultures [again see Chapter 6] and the idea is to improve linkage between the two domains. Perhaps the simplest strategy is to promote contact between the researcher and the user. Advantages of this form of connection are discussed [in Chapter 17] by T. Neville Postlethwaite. As Postlethwaite points out, when the researcher and user are associated, each is more able to respond to the other's concerns — the researcher to questions that are of relevance to the user; the user to knowledge produced by the researcher.

Postlethwaite also assumes that the user is a central administrator who is given responsibility for making educational policy and that, once taken, policy decisions will generate consonant action in the schools. This may work in a country where control over education is centralized and administrators are in close contact with those who work in schools. It is less realistic in larger countries where control over education is diffuse and administrators have little contact with school personnel. Moreover, the Postlethwaite model overlooks the possibility of conflicts of interest among the various parties who are concerned with education and that all parties, not just powerful administrators, might wish to respond to research knowledge. Such possibilities were discussed, however, by Coleman [in Chapter 10] who called for widespread dissemination of research knowledge in the mass media.

This latter suggestion is also attractive, but it is not without problems. Among others, some researchers have greater access to the media than do other researchers, and media coverage may unduly emphasize the interests and political commitments of reporters, their employers, and other powerful interests. In addition, media reports almost inevitably strip away the qualifications, theory, and contextual details associated with social research, so research knowledge is debased. Nevertheless, the mass media are one of the most frequent means through which research knowledge is transmitted to users (see Anderson, 1984). A major study of the media reportage of social research was conducted by Weiss and Singer (1988), and an example of media use by social researchers appears in Chapter 24.

How else does research get to potential users? Some of it percolates through by word of mouth and informal networks. Studies of such informal processes were at one time quite popular within agriculture (see, for example, Oeser and Emery, 1958; Rogers, 1983). Educators, too, have their networks. Some meet regularly at the club, or in conventions and workshops, and share ideas which may contain knowledge elements from research. Moreover, professional meetings offer opportunities for vendors to display equipment and materials, and the latter are also sometimes promoted with knowledge elements that were once associated with research.

Which raises an interesting point. Research knowledge often reaches



and social research interact regularly. And in the *John Dewey* vision of *progressive education*, social research becomes an integral part of user activity. These patterns suggest somewhat different role relationships between researchers and users, and these latter may also affect linkage. To illustrate, the traditional model suggests an authoritative role for the researcher who is thought to bring 'expert' knowledge to the user, but some users may reject the idea that 'expert' advice should be followed when it comes to social affairs about which they have personal and detailed knowledge. In contrast, action research involves an alliance between researchers and users, which, critics argue, compromises the independence conditions necessary for generating objective knowledge.

In addition, one should also recognize that knowledge can influence education not only by promoting useful change but also by supporting the status quo or facilitating actions that are questionable. Moreover, these latter outcomes are also a product of the political climate in which that research knowledge is interpreted. To illustrate, the history of IQ testing is one in which research knowledge has been used for purposes of social control. Although originally designed for diagnostic purposes, IQ tests have subsequently been used for eugenic screening, the support of racial bigotry, and the enforced 'tracking' of countless pupils, particularly in American and British schools. As suggested by Leon Kamin [Chapter 22], these outcomes seem to have reflected both dubious beliefs about innate intelligence and predispositions to prejudice against minorities and those who were poor.

So far we have examined mainly research impact at the system or national levels. Research knowledge may also influence teachers, schools, and local schools directly. In fact much evaluation research is pitched at practitioners, and examples may be found in an essay by Marvin C. Alkin, Richard Daillak, and Peter White [Chapter 23]. As these authors point out, although evaluation research has been criticized for being 'ineffective', examples may be found for both its 'mainstream' (i.e., 'simple') effects and its broader impact in schools and school systems. This observation leads Alkin *et al.* to ponder potential meanings for the concept of research 'utilization' and to offer their own inclusive definition for this concept. They conclude that numerous interest groups in education may use research knowledge, that research knowledge can be used in various ways, and that educational decisions reflect ideological and political pressures as well as knowledge from research and other sources.

Finally, we should also recognize that social research, itself, is not immune to political and ideological influences on its methods and interpretations. Two examples appear in the selections. In the first, Samuel Wineburg discusses research by Robert Rosenthal and others on "The Pygmalion Effect" [Chapter 24]. This research concluded that (some) teachers inadvertently encourage levels of pupil achievement which confirm their preconceptions about pupil intelligence. This study had a



lead to improving links between themselves and users. Four such roles are discussed by Patricia Thomas [in Chapter 19]: the *limestone* role which relies on cumulative or indirect impact, the *gadfly* role, the *insider* role, and the employment of *pressure groups*. In addition, certain researchers seem to be adept at promoting media attention for their research, and such attention also tends to improve links with users [see, for example, Chapters 10 and 24]. Moreover, many researchers disburse knowledge through university lectures and the authorship of textbooks. Of course, this latter mechanism means that research impact is delayed until today's students become tomorrow's professional practitioners.

### Research Knowledge and Educational Change

The fact that research knowledge is made available to users does not mean that it will necessarily be used. Teachers, administrators, and other users have needs which are embedded in a culture that is often refractory to ideas from the research domain, especially if those ideas imply changing practices with which practitioners are comfortable. But if dissatisfaction with the status quo exists, new ideas may then get a more favourable hearing. An example of this principle may be found in the famous decision by the Supreme Court outlawing segregation in US public schools, *Brown vs. Board of Education* [see Chapter 20 by Irving Louis Horowitz and James Everett Katz]. This decision was based, in part, on social research knowledge which tended to reinforce dissatisfaction with segregationist practices then in place in US public schools.

Change also seems more likely when an alternative policy has been suggested and legitimated by a respectable authority. A number of mechanisms have been used to alert legislators and citizens to policy alternatives, of which a potent example is the appointment of a 'special commission', 'blue ribbon committee', or expert enquiry which is asked to review relevant materials, including research knowledge, and to prepare recommendations for legislative action. This mechanism has been popular in the United States, Commonwealth countries, and Scandinavia, and it has sometimes produced significant changes in educational policy in those countries. In some instances such commissions may ask for specific research reports or their memberships may include professional researchers. A good review of this and other mechanisms open to governments was prepared by Maurice Kogan and J. Myron Atkin [Chapter 21].

In thinking about the potential effects of research knowledge, one should recognize that several patterns of linkage are possible. In the *traditional model*, research comes first, and the knowledge it generates is then made available for stimulating social change. In *evaluation research*, social action comes first, and the knowledge generated through research is then available for subsequent decisions. In *action research*, social change



tions); and empirical elements (designs for research, research tools, evidence). These knowledge elements have meaning because they are embedded within systems of thought and investigation ('paradigms'), and each type of knowledge has its own potential for affecting the decisions of those in positions of influence. Thus, social research should be conceived to have various potentials for affecting users.

This does not mean that all social research knowledge is known to users or that it has straightforward effects. Educational impact seems to be more likely when mechanisms are in place which make research knowledge available to users, but few studies have yet appeared concerning the effects of various mechanisms. And even when educational users have research knowledge, the decisions they make seem to reflect the needs of various interest groups, as well as ideologies and political pressures, but the latter issues have also attracted little research to date. A lot remains to be learned about research impact in education — which points out the need for additional research on the contexts and effects of social research.

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massive impact on educational research, on teacher education, and on court decisions concerning education. As Wineburg points out, the impact was great because the research conclusions fitted so neatly into the prevailing beliefs of the time.

In the second, R.J.W. Selleck reviews the founding, in the early 1830s, of the Manchester Statistical Society which began its efforts with educational research [Chapter 25]. As Selleck points out, one can learn a lot from these early efforts. Not only did the Mancunians pioneer a number of research techniques that are used to this day, but their work (like ours) was designed within a political context and produced recommendations for alleviating the lot of the poor through education but left untouched the conditions which produced poverty and also ended up by serving, in part, the needs of entrenched interests.

### Summing Up

We began this essay by asking several questions. Does social research have an impact? And if it does, why does that impact appear? What is the nature of the knowledge created by social research, how does that knowledge affect education, and why has social research received such a bad press?

We are now able to answer some of these questions. Regarding the first, we conclude that (despite bad press) not only can social research have an impact on education but its effects have been striking. This does not mean that all social research has an impact. Indeed, some research seems to have little impact, and in other cases social research seems to have supported the status quo in education or to have had effects that were not anticipated by researchers or their supporters. Moreover, research impact can probably be improved. But — despite all aridity — it is clear that social research has had substantial effects on education.

Why then is social research so often criticized? In part, the criticism of social research seems to result from belief in a 'simple' model for knowledge generation and impact which has it that social research can generate *facts* and that those facts can lead users to make unfettered decisions that will improve social life. This 'simple' model seems to be accepted by many persons and to underlie a good deal of social research funding — particularly funding for applied studies. However, the 'simple' model is both narrow and unrealistic, and when social research fails to deliver the crisp *facts* expected of it, and its knowledge does not have hoped for effects within education and elsewhere, believers in the 'simple' model get discouraged.

We have suggested that a more realistic model should begin with the realization that social research can generate various types of knowledge: elements of theory (such as technical concepts, propositions, and explana-



*Part 1*

## *Can Social Research Have an Effect?*



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