

MANPOWER FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

My remarks have to do with the future of government and public administration. This assumes that the setting of manpower policy is *in context*, therefore the changing characteristics of that context guide and influence both the setting and the implementation of manpower policy. What is government of public administration like, at his time, and what will it be like in the future.

In attempting to describe the present and the future of public administration, I shall use two techniques: a counterpoint between traditional and future practices and concepts and, a description of what I believe to be incorrect assumptions and resulting *false correlates*. My remarks will concentrate on four basic aspects of public administration: rationality, change, structure and education.

Rationality

No concept is more fundamental to public administration than rationality. In very general and summary terms we define rationality to be goal-oriented activities and behavior. In traditional public administration we assumed that we set sensible goals, and then we organize to achieve them. Our organizations are designed with the assumption that there is

agreement to goals, those goals have been clarified and understood, and that, above all, goals can be achieved. We assume that we know now *what* to do.

Our only problem is figuring out how to do it.

All empirical evidence and most theory and logic now indicates that our thinking was wrong, not totally wrong, but wrong enough to badly mislead us.

We are slowly learning to modify our thinking and practices into to a new set of concepts of rationality, what could be called "administrative rationality". Simon, Lindbloom, Mayo, Wildavsky and others have verified the usual manner in which administrative decisions are made and administrative practices are carried out. In administrative rationality we reverse the pure rationality. For instance, we once said "we know what ought to be done, the problem is finding out how to do it". NOT SO. Now we say: "we know how to do things, the problem is figuring out what ought to be done". It is my estimate that increasing efforts of government will be toward "figuring out what ought to be done".

And "we set sensible, agreed upon, prioritized goals, and them we institutionalize or organize to achieve them". NO LONGER SO. Now we say "we seek to develop commitment to sensible and agreeable actions in order to achieve sensible overall objectives". Increasingly this will be understood to be the most feasible and productive approach to rationality. Also said: "we must plan, we must hire planners, we must not get too far along until we have a fully developed long range plan". THESE WORDS HAVE VIRTUALLY NO EMPIRICAL WARRANTY. Now we say and we really believe: that "Planning is closely associated with acting, indeed, good planning *is* acting".

Following Harlan Cleveland, successful modern planning is "innovation in a generally agreed upon direction". Future government practices will, I believe, reflect this concept of planning.

A preoccupation with data and numbers. The paralysis of analysis.

Now it is up to those of you who are specialists in manpower planning to determine the extent to which my challenge to traditional concepts and practices of rationality are applicable to you. Much of what I have heard at this seminar seems to be deeply rooted in traditional rationality.

Structure

The second aspect of public administration with which I shall deal is structure, considered as the design or arrangement of an organization. Again, we have the counterpoint between traditional, contemporary and future perspectives. Our traditions are heavily Weberian scalar hierarchy, chain of command, span of control, authority in the title or office, etc. Much of modern public administration has challenged these traditions. Slowly we are developing the organizational and management skills that are making a new structural reality. This is evidenced by increasing democracy in the work place, by increasing authority in the work group not by the boss but by the development of a commitment to the provision of not just jobs, but satisfying jobs. And we are increasingly able to decentralize and establishing forms of local control. To be sure there are important reasons to centralize, but there are equally important reasons to decentralize and it is good that we have come to a very productive tension between the forces for decentralization and centralization. While formal structure and Weberian concepts are the dominant reality, we are increasingly watching the first *fruits* of the human *relations* movement in public administration.

And a return to forms of decentralization, local control, citizen involvement, neighborhood, government and similar problems.

My impression, right or wrong, is that most persons in the manpower planning field are strongly inclined toward centralization, hierarchy and control. No doubt there are reasons,

many associated with cultural variation and the so called level of development, for given nations states.

Still, most of what I have heard at this seminar brings me to the conclusion that the field of manpower planning is in many ways quite traditional.

Change

The third basic aspect of public administration is change. While this subject is as old as the field, some of our best perceptions of it are rather recent. Most of us, at least those who are my age or older, are the victims of a false correlate.

It was our understanding, that change is as essential as growth. NOT SO. Yet most of our government practice and policies as well as almost all of our administrative behavior is to the effect that growth and change are the same thing. It is now clear that change is the eternal and essential dynamic, while growth and its opposite, decline, are situational requisites of change.

We learned how to manage growth, as a form of change, but we never learned how to manage decline. We know how to build an organization but not how to destroy one. We know about increments but know nothing of decrements. We know about evolution but not about devolution. When we are instructed about being a "change agent" we always assumed that the change was to something more not to something less. So, change takes many forms, growth, stability, and decline, and our problem is to decide when to use each.

Traditionally we thought that most changes were basically technological. In fact the two great French organizational theorists, Crozier and Elau, seem to think that change is technology. This is again a false correlate. It is now clear that *basic change* is usually cultural, religious, political or administrative. Several simple examples will do.

Technologically we know how to control birth, clean the air, clean the water, and provide full nutrition. We have no technological excuse.

The change must be political, cultural, and administrative.

Clearly, as *Future Shock* indicates, change is exponential. In that case, how can public administration bring about desired change as well as respond effectively to a social and political change?

We have always associated change with reform and reorganization. This is a false correlate again. With exponential change we must design an organization that would be highly adaptable. This will mean clusters or groups of trained and adaptable professionals who could be directed according to requirements. The idea is not to reform or reorganize. The idea is to have *change criteria* that would determine when changes are needed. The criteria will come to be the dominant manifestation of the public organization, not the boss, the hierarchy, or the filing system.

Once again, it is my impression that manpower planning is rather traditional when it comes to the subject of change. And this is puzzling because planning is usually for some kind of change.

Education

The final subject for these remarks is education. As has been observed, there is a close relationship between the educational system and professions. In the case of public service, a person educated as a professional geologist may work for government, but is still a professional geologist. In fact our public service is really an amalgam of persons educated in virtually every field. Aside from public administration, there is no particular field that prepares persons specifically for public service. There are, however, many fields that educate for a profession that is almost exclusively governmental—primary and secondary education, social work, planning, recreation park administration and criminal justice.

The problem is, most of these fields as well as many others, provide no instruction for government functioning, in public management practices, budgeting personnel, etc. We need to

invent linking models from our schools and programs in public administration to these other fields in the university. Public administration has innovated more than most other fields in North American higher education, providing mid-career graduate programs.

This recognizes that *most* public managers have risen to those positions from some other profession, and they now need instruction in public management. These innovations might be usefull in other nations, but the traditional resistance to innovation in higher education should never be underestimated.

Speech delivered by George Frederickson, professor of the Eastern Washington State University, during the International Seminar "Issues in International and Comparative Manpower Studies" held on February 18 and 20 in Mexico City, sponsored jointly by the National Institute of Public Administration of Mexico and the National Institute of Public Management of the United States.