

The New Public-Management Paradigm  
And The Search For Democratic Accountability

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ABSTRACT

*Can we permit empowered, responsive civil servants to make decisions and be innovative and still have democratic accountability? This important question<sup>1</sup> haunts those who would advocate a "new public management." The proponents of a new public-management paradigm emphasize performance the ability of their strategy to produce results. But they cannot ignore the troubling question of political accountability. They must develop a process that not only permits public managers to produce better results but also provides accountability to a democratic electorate.*

The champions of the new public management have challenged the traditional public-administration paradigm that has ruled our thinking and deliberations (if not our practice) for over a century. Their argument is quite simple: The traditional method for organizing the executive branch of government is too cumbersome, too bureaucratic, too inefficient, too unresponsive, too unproductive. It does not give us the results we want from government. And today, citizens expect government to produce results. They are no longer tolerant of inefficiency or ineffectiveness. Thus, we need a new way of doing business, a new paradigm for the management of government.<sup>2</sup>

But wait, respond the defenders of the traditional public-administration paradigm. Our approach to doing the business of government may have some deficiencies, but it does have one, very big advantage: It is accountable to the citizens. Democratic accountability is not optional; it is an essential characteristic of any approach to structuring the executive branch of government. It does not make any difference how well your paradigm works for private-sector organizations. Government is different. Government must be responsible not just to some collection of interested stakeholders, but to the entire polity. If your system does not ensure accountability to the citizens, then it is ? by definition ? unacceptable.<sup>3</sup>

This challenge cannot be ignored. The advocates of any new approach to the management of the public enterprise must not only demonstrate that their strategy is more effective or more efficient. They must also demonstrate that it is politically responsible. Those who seek to create a new paradigm of public management have the burden of providing a correlative concept of democratic accountability.

### **The Public-Administration Paradigm and the Corruption Problem**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the public-administration paradigm evolved in response to the corruption that had invaded American government. In his famous 1887 essay on "The Study of Administration," Woodrow Wilson observed that Americans had "just begun

purifying a civil service which was rotten full fifty years ago." Moreover, he directly linked the elimination of corruption to the introduction of effective administration: "The poisonous atmosphere of city government, the crooked secrets of state administration, the confusion, sinecurism, and corruption ever again discovered in the bureaux at Washington forbid us to believe that any clear conceptions of what constitutes good administration are as yet very widely current in the United States." And thus, Wilson argued for a new approach to the task of government administration: "This is why there should be a science of administration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government, to make its business less unbusinesslike, to strengthen and purify its organization, and to crown its dutifulness" (1887, 16, 13).

And, in many ways, the public-administration paradigm did solve the corruption problem. By separating the implementation of public policies from the political decisions that created those policies, just as Wilson recommended, the advocates of the new public administration sought to prevent the politics of personal favoritism and gain from meddling in the administrative decisions about personnel, procurement, finance, and service delivery. As a result, American government in the twentieth century has indeed been much less corrupt than in nineteenth. Of course, twentieth-century government has not been completely free of corruption; but whenever public power has been abused, it could be attributed to a breakdown in one of the underlying principles of the public-administration paradigm ? particularly the principle of separating administration from politics.

### *The Public-Management Paradigm and the Performance Problem*

At the end of the twentieth century, however, American government is plagued less by the problem of corruption than by the problem of performance. American government may not be very crooked; but neither is it very effective. The response has been what some have called the new public management with its emphasis on producing results.

In many ways, the public-management paradigm is a direct response to the inadequacies of the public-administration paradigm ? particularly, to the inadequacies of bureaucracy. Under the new public management, civil servants are not automatons, merely implementing policies according to rules promulgated from above. Rather, the public-management paradigm assumes that civil servants are intelligent, that they understand the problems their agencies are charged with alleviating, that they have some useful ideas ? either their own or ones borrowed from others ? about how to fix those problems, and that they can, if given the freedom, quickly convert those ideas into effective action. Indeed, the public-management paradigm assumes that, because front-line civil servants are close to the problems, they are in a very good position (perhaps the best position) to decide what approach to take in solving public problems.

The advocates of the new public management make no attempt to pretend that administration can be disconnected from politics or policy. They accept that it is and seek to exploit this well recognized but carefully avoided reality. Thus, under the public-management paradigm, civil servants are empowered to make decisions. They are instructed to be responsive to individual citizens and encouraged to develop new, innovative approaches to solving public problems.

The advocates of the new public management are contemptuous of the public-administration paradigm. They reject the idea that politics should be (let alone can be) separated from administration ? that the mind of the civil servant should be disconnected from

the solution to policy problems. They scorn the bureaucratic ideal that seeks to base the implementation of policy on impersonal rules. Yet, ironically, they do not completely reject scientific management; but rather than search for the "one best way," they look for today's "best practice."<sup>4</sup>

The advocates of the public-management paradigm are seeking to solve the problem of performance. To them, controlling corruption is much less of a challenge to today's government than producing results. Consequently, they are not too concerned about discarding some of the public-administration safeguards that helped eliminate (and continue to prevent) corruption. More significantly, that have also not worried about how their new performance paradigm can mesh with our existing ? or even new ? concepts of political accountability. Nor have they bothered to construct a new paradigm of democratic accountability.

### **Wilson, Taylor, and Weber ? The Public-Administration Paradigm**

The intellectual heritage of the current public-administration paradigm comes from the thinking, writing, and proselytizing of Woodrow Wilson, Frederick Winslow Taylor, and Max Weber. Indeed, these three constructed the rationale for the current form of most of our government. Wilson argued that administration should be ? and could be ? separated from politics; after those responsible for politics made the policy decisions, the task of implementing those policies could be turned over to those who were well versed in the "science of administration" and would carry out this implementation task in the most efficient way possible (1887). This would be possible because, as Taylor argued, "among the various methods and implements used in each element of each trade there is always one method and one implement which is quicker and better than any of the rest" (1911, 25). Finally, Weber argued that bureaucracy was the most efficient organizational mechanism; thus, a bureaucracy would be ideal for implementing Taylor's scientific principles.<sup>5</sup>

Wilson, Taylor and Weber all strove to improve efficiency. And, although efficiency is a value in itself, it has another advantage. This efficiency is impersonal; and thus it is fair. By separating administration from politics, by applying scientific examination to the design of the best work processes, and by employing bureaucratic organizations to implement these work processes, government would ensure not only that its policies were fair, but also that their implementation was fair too.<sup>6</sup> And, of course, the administration of American government has to be fair.

The emphasis on efficiency has another advantage: It implies that the policy implementation can, indeed, be separated from policy decisions. If there is, indeed, an efficient way to implement any policy, if there is one best way to carry out any policy decision, and if there is a generic and universal organizational apparatus for deploying those one best ways, then separating administration from policy is quite doable.

Furthermore, separating administration from politics permits the governmental process to be conceptualized in a tidy, linear way: People elect their legislative representatives and chief executive; these individuals (and their immediate, political assistants) undertake the political task of developing and deciding upon public policies; then the administrative apparatus of government determines the most efficient way to implement each policy and does so; finally, in case anything goes amiss, the elected officials oversee the work of the administrators.

Conceptualizing the government process in this manner also provides for a clear, simple, and direct method of democratic accountability. Because administration can be separated from policy and because the bureaucratic apparatus of government will find and adopt the most efficient way to implement any policy, the public need not worry about administration. All the citizens need to worry about is the policy. And if they don't like their government's policies (or the way in which their administration is being overseen), they have a direct and effective means to correct the situation: They can vote their elected officials out of office. That is political accountability. That is direct accountability.<sup>7</sup>

The public-administration paradigm makes sense ? it is internally consistent ? because the distinction between politics and administration permits the construction of a simple, appealing, direct model of political accountability. Thus, for all its flaws, the old paradigm has one, significant advantage: political legitimacy. The political-accountability relationships are transparent. The traditional public-administration paradigm meshes well with our traditional paradigm of democratic accountability.

### *Wilson's Distinction Between Politics and Administration*

In "The Study of Administration," Woodrow Wilson laid out the "distinction" between politics and administration. "Public administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law," stated Wilson. "The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics." Indeed, Wilson wrote of the "truth" that "administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions" (1887, 19, 18).

Wilson described his distinction between politics and administration in several ways: "The distinction is between general plans and specific means." "The broad plans of governmental action are not administrative; the detailed execution of such plans is administrative." Wilson did not try to define the distinction very precisely because, to him, "this discrimination between administration and politics is now, happily, too obvious to need further discussion" (1887, 19, 18).<sup>8</sup>

In 1881, President Garfield was assassinated by a disappointed office seeker, and, two years later, Congress passed the Pendleton Act to reform the federal civil service. Thus, when Wilson wrote in 1887, civil service reform was very much on his mind. To Wilson, it "is a plain business necessity" that American government have "a body of thoroughly trained officials serving during good behavior." This, of course, raises the question: "What is to constitute good behavior?" To which Wilson replied with his own definition of what is now called "neutral competence": all civil servants should have a "steady, hearty allegiance to the policy of the government they serve." Moreover, such policy "will not be the creation of permanent officials, but of statesmen whose responsibility to public opinion will be direct and inevitable." Thus, concluded Wilson, civil-service reform "is clearing the moral atmosphere of official life by establishing the sanctity of public office as a public trust, and by making the service unpartisan, it is opening the way for making it businesslike" (1887, 21-22, 18).

Indeed, Wilson's "eminently practical science of administration" was designed to do more than provide guidance for structuring the civil service: "It is a thing almost taken for granted among us, that the present movement called civil service reform must, after the accomplishment of its first purpose, expand into efforts to improve, not the personnel only, but also the

organization and methods of our government offices; because it is plain that their organization and methods need improvement only less than their personnel." "We are now rectifying methods of appointment; we must go on to adjust executive functions more fitly and to prescribe better methods of executive organization and action" (1887, 11, 18).

Moreover, to Wilson, "the objective of administrative study is to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of empirical experiment and set them upon foundations laid deep in stable principle." Thus, nearly a quarter of a century before Frederick Taylor's ideas became famous when the Interstate Commerce Commission held hearings in 1910 on railroad rates, Wilson had already advocated what Louis Brandeis labeled during those hearings "scientific management." Wilson wrote of "a science of administration," and worried that "not much impartial scientific methods is to be discerned in our [American] administrative practices" (1887, 18, 13). Indeed, one of "the most prominent features of Wilson's political scholarship," writes Neils Thorsen, was "a maturing conviction that scientific knowledge of economic, political, and administrative practices could be introduced into the conduct of government" (1988, x-xi).

In search of such knowledge, Wilson hoped that Europe could provide models of government administration. For those who might "be frightened at the idea of looking into foreign systems of administration for instruction and suggestion," Wilson emphasized the distinction between uniquely American ends and the adaptation of helpful European means. Wilson was solely interested in "studying administration as a means of putting our own politics into convenient practice." And to make this point, he offered a metaphor:

If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly, I can borrow his way of sharpening the knife without borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it; and so, if I see a monarchist dyed in the wool managing a public bureau well, I can learn his business methods without changing one of my republican spots. He may serve his king; I will continue to serve the people; but I should like to serve my sovereign as well as he serves his.

Whatever administrative model was found in Europe, Wilson emphasized that "it must be adapted" to the U.S. form of federal government: "we must Americanize it" (1887, 23, 13-14).

### *Taylor's Scientific Management*

Frederick Winslow Taylor advocated a variety of changes ? a "complete mental revolution"; a "great mental revolution" (Wrege and Greenwood 1991, 191) ? in how the nation should organize its workplaces. He was concerned about "the great loss which the whole country is suffering through inefficiency in almost all of our daily acts" and was convinced that "the remedy for this inefficiency lies in systematic management, rather than in searching for some unusual or extraordinary man." And at the core of Taylor's thinking was his belief that "in each element of each trade there is always one method and one implement which is quicker and better than any of the rest" (1911, 7, 25).

The inefficiency that Taylor found was created by the "rule-of-thumb methods" and "traditional knowledge" that workers employed when they did their job. This, however, was not their fault. Rather, it resulted from "the old systems of management in common use" that gave each worker "the final responsibility for doing his job practically as he thinks best, with comparatively little help and advice from management." Taylor wanted management to

undertake the task of designing the work. He wanted management ? specifically, the planning department ? to determine scientifically how each component of work could be carried out most efficiently, particularly by a "first-class" worker who was scientifically suited for the task (1911, 16, 32, 25).<sup>9</sup>

Under scientific management, wrote Taylor:

the managers assume new burdens, new duties, and responsibilities never dreamed of in the past.

The managers assume, for instance, the burden of gathering together all of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulæ which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work.

In particular, Taylor thought that the managers of any enterprise had four "new duties":

? They develop a science for each element of a man's work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method.

? They scientifically select and then train, teach, and develop the workman, whereas in the past he chose his own work and trained himself as best he could.

? They heartily cooperate with the men so as to insure all of the work being done in accordance with the principles of the science which has been developed.

? There is an almost equal division of work and the responsibility between the management and the workmen. The management take over [sic] all work for which they are better fitted than the workmen, while in the past almost all of the work and the greater part of the responsibility were thrown upon the men.

These are management's responsibilities, argued Taylor, because the workers do not have time to both figure out the best system and do their work. For even "if the workman was well suited to the development and use of scientific data, it would be physically impossible for him to work at his machine and at a desk at the same time." Furthermore, Taylor continued, "it is also clear that in most cases one type of man is needed to plan ahead and an entirely different type to execute the work" (1911, 36-38).

Taylor organized work around the concept of "the task" ? which he called "perhaps the most prominent single element in modern scientific management." The task "specifies not only what is to be done but how it is to be done and the exact time allowed for doing it." And the job of defining each such task is the responsibility of management: "The work of every workman is fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance, and each man receives in most cases complete writing instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work." To Taylor, "scientific management" was "task management" (1911, 39).

Moreover, management has the responsibility of matching people with the jobs for which they are best suited. That was the definition of a "first-class man" ? someone who was scientifically suited for the job. And, although people would be second class at some jobs, everyone was first class at some job. "I have tried," Taylor told the U.S. House of

Representatives, "to make it clear that for each type of workman some job can be found at which he is 'first class,' with the exception of those men who were perfectly well able to do the job, but won't do it" (Wrege and Greenwood 1991, 194).

Taylor's concept of "the task" ? and his approach to each individual task ? is reflected in the "job descriptions" of our civil service system. For in government, it is the responsibility of management (not the worker) to define each task that each worker should perform. These tasks are then listed on the job description, and management fills the job by scientifically selecting the individual whose qualifications best match the job description. The worker's responsibility is to do these tasks ? and only these tasks. Workers are not supposed to think about these tasks; that is strictly management's job. Civil service systems apply Taylor's concept of scientific management, which "involves the establishment of many rules, laws, and formulæ which replace the judgment of the individual workman" (1911, 37).

Taylor argued that his four duties "can be applied absolutely to all classes of work, from the most elementary to the most intricate." Further, he argued that "when they are applied, the results must of necessity be overwhelmingly greater than those which it is possible to attain under the management of initiative and incentive." Indeed, Taylor went even further: "The general adoption of scientific management would readily in the future double the productivity of the average man engaged in industrial work." And, although Taylor did all of his work in industrial settings, he clearly believed that his "principles" could be applied to the management of a variety of institutions including churches, universities, and "government departments" (1911, 40, 142, 8).

### *Weber's Bureaucracy*

As society became more complex, argued Max Weber, it needed more complex institutions. And to Weber, this meant a shift from informal, personal organizations to bureaucracy. Weber's bureaucracy was distinguished by a hierarchical organization staffed by appointees with credentials and expertise who had regular, official duties that they carried out as "trustees" by impersonally applying rational rules over a specific jurisdictional area. In government, argued Weber, this is what is called "bureaucratic authority" while in the private sector it is called "bureaucratic 'management'" (1946, 81).<sup>10</sup>

"The principle of hierarchical office authority," wrote Weber, "is found in all bureaucratic structures: in state and ecclesiastical structures as well as in large [political] party organizations and private enterprise." Indeed, he asserted, "it does not matter for the character of bureaucracy whether its authority is called 'private' or 'public.'" Hierarchy is still the organizing principle, and this "office hierarchy is monocratically organized." Specifically, wrote Weber, "the principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones" (1946, 81-82).

The people who work in the various positions in this hierarchy earn educational credentials, obtain an appointment, develop their expertise, and agree to carry out their duties in a loyal yet impersonal way. "Office management, at least all specialized office management," wrote Weber, "usually presupposes thorough and expert training." When accepting a position in a bureaucracy, he continued, an individual accepts "a specific obligation of faithful management in return for a secure existence." This individual is not loyal to his boss as a person but to the

boss's position; that is, "modern loyalty is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes" (1946, 82-83).

To Weber, a bureaucracy behaves like a referee with a computer: "Bureaucracy is like a modern judge who is a vending machine into which the pleadings are inserted together with the fee and which then disgorges the judgment together with its reasons mechanically derived from the code" (Bendix 1960, 421). Weber's bureaucracy ? with its emphasis on the impersonal implementation of impersonal though rational rules ? was both efficient and fair:

Experience tends universally to show that the purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization ? that is, the monocratic variety of bureaucracy ? is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. . . . It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations, and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks (Weber 1947, 337).

Nevertheless, the interference of politics could undermine both a bureaucracy's efficiency and its fairness.

Indeed, Weber recognized, political corruption could interfere with the work of expert appointees impersonally following the rules. Although Weber believed that effective bureaucracies would be a benefit to politicians when they sought reelection, he also recognized that this was not always the case:

Where the demand for administration by trained experts is considerable, and the party followings have to recognize an intellectually developed, educated, and freely moving 'public opinion,' the use of unqualified officials falls back upon the party in power at the next election. . . . The demand for a trained administration now exists in the United States, but in the large cities, where immigrant votes are 'corralled,' there is, of course, no educated public opinion. Therefore, popular elections of the administrative chief and also of his subordinate officials usually endanger the expert qualification of the official as well as the precise functioning of the bureaucratic mechanism (1946, 85).

Thus, to ensure both efficiency and fairness, Weber, like Wilson, sought to separate politics from administration.

### **The Fallacy of Efficient, Non-Political Administration**

Unfortunately, the public-administration paradigm has proven neither as efficient nor as non-political as the writings of Wilson, Taylor, and Weber predicted. In fact, it is both very inefficient and quite political. The logic of each of the intellectual founders of the public-administration paradigm was plagued by a critical fallacy.

#### (1) *Weber's Fallacy: Bureaucracies are bureaucratic*

Is bureaucracy efficient? Today we think not. Indeed, today the word bureaucracy is, in the vernacular, synonymous to inefficiency.



One of the characteristics of a bureaucracy is the specialization of tasks. And the rationale for this specialization is its efficiency. Because different individuals specialize in doing different tasks, each individual need master only his or her narrow assignment. People throughout the bureaucracy need not know how to perform all of its tasks; they need not even understand these individual tasks or how they mesh together. Instead, each can concentrate on doing one task very well.

Unfortunately, dividing the work of a bureaucracy into distinct, specialized tasks creates a new problem: coordination. If everyone performs all the tasks, they can all coordinate these tasks in their own, separate brains; there is no coordination problem. But when the tasks are all divided up, coordination becomes a major burden. Indeed, it is often an impossible burden. And if the conduct of the different tasks is not coordinated, the organization can become very inefficient.

(2) *Taylor's Fallacy: There is not necessarily one, universal, best way.*

In an age where the answer to every scientific question has a single, universally-correct answer (and a zillion wrong ones), the idea that every management question should also have a single, universally-correct answer seems not only attractive, but also plausible. But management is less like science than it is like engineering. And, the questions of engineering have many possible answers (Behn 1996, 100-102). In some circumstances, some answers will be better than others. But even for a single set of circumstances, there may be multiple correct answers.

(3) *Wilson's Fallacy: Implementation is inherently political.*

Finally, it is impossible to separate administration from politics and policy. Administration is not just a question of efficiency and rational rules; it inherently involves policy choices, at least given how elected officials in the United States behave. They cannot ? collectively or individually ? think of all the possible circumstances, situations, and special instances that will arise. No matter how hard the political leaders in the legislative and executive branches try, they cannot develop a set of policies that will apply in every situation. Individual cases may be covered by no policy ? or by several, contradictory policies. Thus those charged with the mere, efficient implementation of authorized policies must ? by default ? make policy decisions too.

Indeed, Wilson himself recognized that administrative issues were connected to political ones ? or at least that the division of responsibility between politics and administration is an inherently political question:

The study of administration, philosophically viewed, is closely connected with the study of the proper distribution of constitutional authority. To be efficient it must discover the simplest arrangements by which responsibility can be unmistakably fixed upon officials; the best way of dividing authority without hampering it, and responsibility without obscuring it.

Nevertheless, Wilson hoped that "administrative study can discover the best principles upon which to base such distribution" of power between political and administrative officials (1887, 19-20).

But suppose such an administrative study would discover some excellent (if not

necessarily best) principles for dividing power between political and administrative officials. What would happen then? Would these principles be quickly codified into law? We all doubt it. For the distribution of constitutional authority ? particularly between the legislative and executive branches ? is (in the United States) a source of continual, political competition. Such a distribution of authority ? and thus of power ? can be influenced by the conclusions of study, but it is determined by political negotiation and thus by political power.

Nevertheless, at the end of the twentieth century as we attempt to develop new strategies for improving government's inadequate performance, the public-administration paradigm remains extremely attractive. Why? Because it is blessed with a simple and compelling theory of political accountability, which the new, public-management paradigm has yet to match.

John Maynard Keynes wrote that "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any particular influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist" (1964, 383). Neither Wilson, Taylor, nor Weber was an economist. All have been dead for over 70 years. Yet people who know no more of the trio than that Wilson was president of the United State during World War I are, nevertheless, slaves to their ideas.

### **The Question of Democratic Accountability**

What do we mean by democratic accountability? What does it mean to say that, under the public-administration paradigm, both politics and administration are accountable? Accountable to whom? Accountable for what? Accountable how? How exactly will we hold government accountable? Indeed, we employ the phrase "hold government accountable" as if its meaning were obvious.<sup>11</sup> Yet *how* will we hold *whom* accountable for *what*?

The advocates of the public-management paradigm respond: Don't hold us accountable for process; hold us accountable for results. That, at least, appears to answer the "for *what*?" part of the question. In fact, however, it only raises another question: *Who* decides *what results* government should be accountable for producing? Thus, the accountability question becomes (at least from the perspective of the public-management paradigm): *How* will we hold *whom* accountable for producing *whose* results?

Finally, there is one additional issue involved in this accountability question. Who are "we"? That is, who, exactly, is going to undertake the holding-accountable activities. Is this to be the citizens in general, either through the electoral process or in some other way? Is this to be the citizens' elected representatives ? specifically, their elected legislators ? through the traditional process of oversight hearings? Is this to be officially authorized watchdogs, such as auditors and inspectors general, or unofficial, self-authorized watchdogs, such as citizen groups and journalists? To create a new theory of democratic accountability, the advocates of the new public-administration paradigm need to answer the essential question:

*How will who hold whom accountable for producing whose results?*

Thus, the question of democratic accountability has four components; it raises four subsidiary but interrelated questions:

? *Who* will decide what results are to be produced?

? *Who* is accountable for producing these results?

? *Who* is responsible for implementing the accountability process?

? *How* will that accountability process work?

The new public-management paradigm needs a correlative accountability paradigm that addresses these four questions.

### *Who Will Decide What Results Are To Be Produced?*

This is the most troubling question raised by the new public-management paradigm. For the new public management assumes that sometimes ? and perhaps often ? these decisions will be made by civil servants. And yet, how do these unelected (and usually unremovable) civil servants gain the authority to make such policy decisions? Is not this the sole responsibility of elected officials (and their direct political appointees)? How can the advocates of the new public management discard so cavalierly what has been for over a century one of the basic, operational principles of American democracy?

The answer offered by the advocates of the new public management is practical, not theoretical. They simply note that although it has been true under the rules of the traditional public-administration paradigm that civil servants are not supposed to make policy, they often do. This is, of course, the dirty, little secret of public administration: Civil servants do make policy. Typically, they disclaim that they are doing any such thing. They insist that they are merely filling in the administrative details of overall policies established by the political process. For over a hundred years, we have continued to maintain the fiction that civil servants do not make policy.

It is a most convenient (though precarious) fiction. For once we confess to the unpleasant reality that, for civil servants to do their job, they *must* make policy decisions, we have to discard the public-administration paradigm. Yet, by continuing to publicly profess both the principle and the practicality of the politics-administration dichotomy, the advocates of traditional public administration are able to offer an internally consistent (if disingenuous) theory for the implementation of public policy.

The proponents of the new public management have, however, surrendered this advantage. They accept that civil servants do make policy decisions. Indeed, they advocate that civil servants should make policy decisions. And thus they have no escape. They need a new political theory that explains why and how this is (or can be) consistent with democratic accountability. They need a political theory that answers four, interrelated questions about how empowered, responsive civil servants can make innovative decisions in a democratic government:

*The Question of Decentralized Decision-Making:* What is the theory of democratic government that encourages decentralized decision making while still maintaining accountability to the entire polity?

*The Question of Responsiveness:* What is the theory of democratic government that permits individual public employees to be responsive to the needs of individual citizens and still guarantee that government treats all citizens fairly?

*The Question of Empowerment:* What is the theory of democratic government that empowers civil servants to exercise discretion while at the same time ensuring that we remain a government of laws?

*The Question of Innovation:* What is the theory of democratic government that permits ? indeed, encourages ? front-line workers to be innovative in the pursuit of improved performance?

The performance problem itself does not demand a new theory of democratic accountability. A focus on producing results does not require one. But giving civil servants the authority to make decisions about exactly what results to produce ? and about exactly *how* to produce them ? does obligate the advocates of the new public-management paradigm to think seriously about the relationship between the effectiveness of their management strategy and the need for democratic accountability.

*Who Is Accountable for Producing These Results?*

The answer to this question might appear to be obvious: the responsible agency. But the new public management is about more than empowered civil servants engaged in innovative, responsive decision making. Not only does the new public management reject the idea that civil servants are passive (if scientific) implementors of policy decisions; it also rejects the bureaucratic ideal of separate organizations responsible for implementing separate policies.

Behind the traditional concept of public administration, behind the traditional concept organizational accountability is the implicit assumption that one organization is responsible for one policy ? or that at least every policy is the responsibility of just one organization. This is another beauty of the hierarchical bureaucracy. Each component of the organization is clearly responsible for the implementation of one policy ? or one component of that policy. And for each such component of the organization, one individual is clearly in charge; thus, one individual is clearly accountable:

The state superintendent is responsible for the implementation of education policy in the state.

The district superintendent is responsible for the implementation of education policy in the school district.

The school principal is responsible for the implementation of education policy in the school.

The teacher is responsible for the implementation of education policy in the classroom.

Employing a hierarchical bureaucracy to implement a policy makes individual accountability very clear.

This ideal arrangement is, of course, another fiction. For as the purposes we seek to achieve through government become more complex and thus as the policies we seek to implement also become more complex, so do the organizational arrangements necessary to

implement them. Again, however, the advocates of the traditional, public-administration paradigm have it easy. For they can continue to insist on using neat, stove-pipe policies. Perhaps we should label this another principle of public administration: the separation of policies. Each piece of legislation creates one policy which is implemented by one organization. Call this the "one-bill, one-policy, one-organization principle."

If this principle did once describe reality, it certainly no longer does. We recognize that to achieve the purposes of most policies requires the cooperation of many agencies. It may require the cooperation of agencies from different levels of government, for example, from federal, state, and municipal environmental agencies. It may require cooperation of several agencies at the same level ? for example, from state agencies of environmental protection, agriculture, water resources, and commerce. And, of course, a policy often requires the cooperation of private and non-profit organizations too. The ambitious policy purposes we seek to achieve today require the cooperative efforts of a network of organizations.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, how is a network accountable for producing what results? How can the concept of accountability be applied to a network? How is a network defined? Who is part of the network? Who is not? *Who* in the network is accountable? In a traditional bureaucracy, this question has little ambiguity. The manager at each level is the accountable *individual*. But in a cooperative network of individuals ? indeed, in a cooperative network of bureaucracies ? identifying an accountable individual or even accountable individuals is not easy. And *for what* should such individuals be accountable? Are they responsible collectively for producing the overall result? Or is each component of the network only responsible for producing its own, specific component of that overall result. In a post-bureaucratic world (even if that world consists of networks of bureaucracies) identifying who is accountable and for what is not easy. In this post-bureaucratic world, the accountability question becomes even more complicated:

*How will who hold whom in what network accountable for producing whose results?*<sup>13</sup>

*Who Is Responsible For Implementing The Accountability Process?*

Under the traditional, public-administration paradigm, the answer to this question is straightforward. Both elected officials and the electorate have a responsibility. Elected officials are charged with overseeing the implementation of policy by public agencies. And the electorate is charged with overseeing the elected officials. The line of accountability goes straight from civil servants to political appointees to elected officials to the electorate.

Again, of course, reality is slightly different. Almost any public policy is complicated and thus both the implementation of that policy and the oversight of that implementation are also complicated. Thus, both elected officials and the electorate are unable to devote much time to oversight.<sup>14</sup> That is another reason why civil servants end up making policy decisions: Not only is the initial policy guidance vague; so is the ongoing oversight guidance.

Of course, some people do care deeply about both the policy and its implementation. But these stakeholders do not seek to exercise influence strictly by voting. Rather, they create their own accountability process independent of the official one. They seek to influence directly the implementation choices made by political appointees and civil servants by offering information and advice. And they seek to influence the policy decisions of elected officials by offering information and advice, and by providing organizational and financial support during elections.

Because these stakeholders have a deep, personal interest, because the formal process of accountability though superficially direct dilutes any individual's influence, because elected officials are not inherently interested or actively engaged in oversight, because civil servants must make policy decisions (and often with little official guidance), and because these decisions are susceptible to influence, such organized stakeholders are usually the most actively involved in creating accountability ? although their process is completely estranged from the accountability mechanism conceived by the founders of the public-administration paradigm.

The advocates of any new public-management paradigm could simply embrace this reality. They could reject as utopian the traditional concept of elected officials and citizens being responsible for implementing democratic accountability and accept that any policy's stakeholders are the only people with sufficient interest to devote any time to issues of accountability.<sup>15</sup> But the result looks slightly sleazy. Why should the best organized ? even if they have the biggest direct stake in policy ? be delegated (even unofficial) responsibility for implementing accountability? Whatever happened to accountability to the polity?<sup>16</sup>

#### *How Will That Accountability Process Work?*

Under the traditional, public-administration paradigm the accountability process works in a quite straightforward way. Elected officials are responsible for overseeing the implementation of each policy that they established. Then, if the citizens are unhappy with the policy, with the implementation of that policy, or with the oversight of that implementation, they vote these officials out of office. The accountability process works through both elected officials and the electorate.

Unfortunately, this too does not quite work as well in practice as in theory. After all, elected officials establish many policies. Sometimes these policies are even conflicting or contradictory. Sometimes one agency is assigned to implement conflicting policies ? or is given responsibility for implementing a policy without adequate resources. This complicates the accountability process significantly. It complicates the part of the process for which elected officials are responsible. And it complicates the electorate's role.

If the elected officials support a particular policy ? and if they have provided adequate resources to the implementing agency ? then, the oversight of the policy is relatively straightforward. The elected officials need to create simple mechanisms to check if the responsible agency is using its resources wisely, if it is implementing the policy intelligently, and if the policy is producing the desired effects. If not, the elected officials need to change the agency's top officials, the mix of resources, or the policy itself.

But how do elected officials oversee policies with which they fundamentally disagree? Do they strictly oversee the implementation of the policy, checking to see if the policy is achieving the purposes that its creators designed it to achieve? Or should they also reexamine those original purposes? And if their oversight produces a critique, is that because of the inadequate implementation of the policy or of the inadequate policy itself? Any answer is confusing for it is difficult (if not impossible) to separate out such motives.

And for what should elected officials be accountable to citizens? For each individual policy? Or for the overall collection of policies that they supported? Or for the totality of policies established by government? Or for the single policy about which each citizen cares the

most?<sup>17</sup> Once a large collection of diverse policies is implemented, what role do citizens have in the accountability for these policies?

In a parliamentary democracy, the line of accountability is much clearer. The government – the party with the parliamentary majority and thus in charge of the executive branch – is responsible for all the policies. Citizens may like some of those policies but not others, but they know who is responsible. And the loyal opposition constantly seeks to make its differences with those policies clear.<sup>18</sup> Citizens must still choose between bundles of policies, and few citizens will be completely satisfied with every policy and the implementation of every policy in that bundle. Nevertheless, the citizens' role in implementing the accountability process through periodic elections is more straightforward.

The United States does not, however, have a parliamentary democracy. Thus, American citizens cannot easily make the accountability process work. When they vote, they cannot easily send effective signals about the policies (or their implementation) with which they disagree.

Thus, in the United States, the accountability process works primarily outside the constitutional framework. This is unfortunate, for there exist few checks or balances within these extra-constitutional accountability mechanisms. In some circumstances, different stakeholders may check or balance each other. But if several stakeholders can collude, if they can negotiate an agreement that reflects each stakeholder's major interests, they can create an accountability process that is not checked or balanced by other forces, that fails to incorporate the interests of the polity.

Again, the advocates of the new public-management paradigm could simply accept and sanctify this reality. But that would still not make this process of accountability any more democratic.

### **Discretion, Responsibility, and Trust**

Unlike Frederick Taylor and Max Weber, Woodrow Wilson did believe in administrative discretion. His "science of administration" was not the mindless following of minute rules developed by political leaders; rather, his "eminently practical science of administration" would "discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do, and, second, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible costs either of money or of energy." Thus, he specifically advocated the delegation to the administrative apparatus of government the discretion necessary to employ, develop, and adapt the most effective and efficient means of implementing policies. Wilson argued that "the administrator should have and does have a will of his own in the choice of means for accomplishing his work. He is not and ought not to be a mere passive instrument" (1887, 11, 19).

Further, Wilson argued, without such a delegation of discretion, it is impossible to establish responsibility: "large powers and unhampered discretion seem to me the indispensable conditions of responsibility." Thus, "to be efficient," Wilson's study of administration had to "discover the simplest arrangement by which responsibility can be unmistakably fixed upon officials; the best way of dividing authority without hampering it, and responsibility without obscuring it" (1887, 20, 19).

The distinction between politics and administration goes both ways. Not only is Wilson's

administration strictly the act of executing politically enacted laws. So also politics should not meddle in that execution: "Although politics sets the tasks for administration," wrote Wilson, "it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices" (1887, 18). Like reformers throughout our nation's history, Wilson wanted to make government more businesslike ? to take the politics out of administration.

In his essay, Wilson cautioned against "the error of trying to do too much by the vote." To explain his reasoning, he offered a metaphor:

Self-government does not consist in having a hand in everything, any more than housekeeping consists necessarily in cooking dinner with one's own hands. The cook must be trusted with a large discretion as to the management of the fires and the ovens (1887, 20).

Indeed, if you do tell the cook precisely how to manage the fires and the ovens, then the cook is no longer responsible for the quality of the dinner. You are.<sup>19</sup>

But, as Wilson also noted, to delegate discretion to the a cook, the housekeeper must trust the cook; similarly, to delegate discretion to an administrative agency, the public must trust the agency. And, clearly, housekeepers trust their cooks much more than the public trusts its administrative agencies. As Wilson observed: "All sovereigns are suspicious of their servants, and the sovereign people is no exception to the rule" (1887, 20).<sup>20</sup>

To Wilson, this suspicion was not necessarily evil: "If that suspicion could be clarified into wise vigilance, it would be altogether salutary; if that vigilance could be added by the unmistakable placing of responsibility, it would be altogether beneficent." But by itself, Wilson continued, suspicion "is never healthful either in the private or in the public mind." Suspicion had to be combined with trust: "*Trust is strength* in all relations of life." Thus, in both framing constitutions and in creating administration systems, it is necessary to design them to foster trust: "as it is the office of the constitutional reformer to create conditions of trustfulness, so it is the office of the administrative organizer to fit administration with conditions of clear-cut responsibility which shall insure trustworthiness" (1887, 20).

Unlike Woodrow Wilson, however, James Madison did not believe in trust. Thus, Madison designed a constitution that does not "create conditions of trustfulness." Indeed, if anything, Madison designed a constitution that reinforces suspicion. By designing multiple institutions with specific responsibility for balancing and checking each other, Madison created competing institutions that were suspicious ? not trustful ? of each other. (If that were not enough, we continually create new institutions ? e.g., inspectors general and independent prosecutors ? with the sole job of being suspicious about others. And, of course, journalists are in the suspicion business full time.) As Wilson observed, "we go on criticizing when we ought to be creating" (1887, 16).

In his critique of the new public management, Donald Savoie has commented on the problem of errors:

Public administration operates in a political environment that is always on the lookout for 'errors' and that exhibits an extremely low tolerance for mistakes. . . . in business it does not much matter if you get it wrong ten percent of the time as long as you turn a profit at the end of the year. In government, it does not much matter if you get it right 90 percent of the time because



the focus will be on the 10 percent of the time you get it wrong (1995a, 114-115)

Indeed, in government, it does not much matter if you get it right 99 percent of the time because the focus will be on the one percent of the time you get it wrong. That is why The Ten Commandments of Government are: "Thou shalt not make a mistake. Thou shalt not make a mistake . . . Thou shalt not make a mistake" (Behn 1991b, 1).

Institutionalized suspicion undermines trust. An institution charged with being suspicious will, unless it is completely incompetent, uncover suspicious behavior. It matters little whether the dubious conduct is a minor error in following the procurement rules or a major, damaging error in judgment over policy. Indeed, the small procedural mistakes may do more to undermine trust in government than major policy failures. For the reality of the small, procedural mistake is obvious to all; yet the existence of a major, policy failure is always subject to much disputation.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the repeated, daily discovery of small flaws in the attention to the details of established, bureaucratic rules may do more to undermine trust in government than ongoing policy debates over large, substantive issues.

Trust is a fragile commodity ? particularly in government. Yet all governments require trust. Wilson understood that. Moreover, the responsibility and discretion required to implement the new public-management paradigm require some major increases in American's trust of their various governments. Unfortunately, we have few public institutions devoted to the task of building trust. Rather, we have numerous organizations both within and outside government that are charged with identifying, tracking down, and exposing our suspicions ? and thus undermining trust. To change our thinking about how we should conduct the business of government ? to replace the traditional public-administration paradigm with the new one of public management ? the advocates of the new paradigm will need to invent ways to enhance the public's trust.

### *Trust and the Moore Paradox*

If this inherent lack of trust and institutionalized creation of suspicion were not enough, the style of the new public managers may further undermine public trust. Effective public managers not only need to take initiative. To actually produce results in today's large, bureaucratic, public agencies, public managers often need particularly high levels of dedication, energy, and audacity. Indeed, the prototype of the new public manager is not merely entrepreneurial; he or she is often brash and aggressive ? taking conspicuous chances, publicly accepting responsibility for both successes and failures, and thumbing a nose or two at not only detractors, but also at those who caution more caution.

"Public *management* is different from public *administration*," emphasizes Donald Savoie, one of the critics of the new public management. Moreover, public *managers* are different from public *administrators*. Savoie presents the contrast in operating styles: "Unlike the traditional public administration language that conjures up images of rules, regulations and lethargic decision-making processes, the very word 'management' implies a decisiveness, a dynamic mindset and a bias for action" (1995a, 113). Yet, citizens are not sure that they trust these governmental entrepreneurs.

The result is what Mark Moore describes as an "interesting paradox":

On one hand, because personal leadership and responsibility seem to be key to successful innovations, they should be valued. On the other hand, the arrogance and flashy style that often accompany personal leadership often attracts hostility and suspicion in the public sector.

A successful innovator in both business and government, notes Moore, requires "an executive's willingness to take the initiative and accept responsibility while remaining modest about his or her contributions and generous in crediting others." Yet, he continues, "executives in the public sector must err even more on the side of modesty" lest they "trigger close press scrutiny and antipathy." This creates the Moore Paradox: "the public expects a style of management in the public sector that would be ineffective if managers actually engaged in it" (1993, 133-134).

Public managers who exercise little initiative produce few results and thus undermine the public's confidence in government. Public managers who are leaders may produce results but through their style still undermine the public's trust. After all, they are functioning in organizations that have detailed rules for how to do ? and not to do ? everything. Thus, observes Marc Zegans, "rule-obsessed organizations turn the timid into cowards and the bold into outlaws" (1997, 115).

Perhaps there is some happy medium: leadership that does produce some results but is not too aggressive. But with all the other considerations and interests that the modern public manager must balance, getting this one just right too seems a daunting burden.

### **Adapting the Existing Mechanism of Retrospective Accountability**

Public administrators are responsible for process. And the traditional method of accountability for process works in a relatively straightforward way: The legislature establishes general guidelines for various processes to be followed, and regulatory units within various executive-branch agencies codify them with more detailed regulations. Then an agency keeps records to demonstrate that it followed those processes faithfully and consistently and might occasionally issue a report summarizing these records. Meanwhile auditors examine these records in detail to see if all the processes were indeed followed (and to detect any dishonest behavior). Others ? journalists, watch-dog organizations, and stakeholders ? also scrutinize the agency carefully, identifying instances when the agency failed to implement its own processes. And when a pattern of errors emerges, or a particularly egregious case is identified, or a small but juicy mistake is uncovered, legislative committees hold hearings and take corrective action. Sometimes people who failed to follow the prescribed processes are fired or disciplined. Moreover, because all this is well known, agencies are motivated to achieve compliance with the established processes.

Public managers are responsible for results. So why cannot this traditional method of accountability be applied to results rather than processes? Why can't we just adapt the traditional accountability mechanisms to our new focus on performance? For example: The legislature would establish general guidelines for the results to be achieved during the next fiscal year, and some executive-branch organization would codify them with more detailed goals. Then an agency would keep records to demonstrate that it is making progress toward achieving these goals and would occasionally issue a report summarizing its accomplishments. Meanwhile, auditors would examine these records in detail to see if the goals were indeed achieved (and to detect any dishonest behavior). Others ? journalists, watch-dog organizations, and stakeholders ? would also scrutinize the agency carefully, identifying instances when the

agency failed to achieve its own goals. And when a pattern of failure emerges, or a particularly egregious failure is identified, or a small but juicy failure is uncovered, legislative committees would hold hearings and take corrective action. Sometimes people who failed to achieve their goals would be fired or disciplined. Moreover, because all this would be well known, agencies would be motivated to achieve their goals.

This is simply the traditional, retrospective accountability mechanism currently employed by legislatures to ensure that executive agencies follow all processes designed to ensure fairness and efficiency. It is generic. Except that it has been adapted to create a retrospective accountability mechanism for ensuring that executive agencies achieve specific goals.

This accountability process requires the legislature to establish at least general purposes; but legislatures already do that. It also requires executive agencies to establish specific goals that can indicate progress towards realizing those general purposes; given all the wannabe, hot-shot public managers in government, they ought to be willing to establish a specific goal or two.<sup>22</sup> Then, once an agency has chosen a goal (or goals) for the fiscal year, the accountability process for results can follow the accountability process already designed, employed, and perfected for process.

To implement this retrospective accountability mechanism, the legislature would have to do two things. During the fiscal year, the legislature would review the choice of the goal. After the fiscal year, the legislature could evaluate the agency's ability to achieve the goal:

*Reviewing the goal:* After the goal has been chosen, the legislature needs to determine if the goal makes sense. It can assign staff to analyze the goal, consider alternatives, and assess the process the agency employed to pick the goal. It can hold hearings to determine if the stakeholders and the general public are satisfied with the goals. Then, if the legislature is unsatisfied with the agency's choice, it can ask the agency to rethink its goal and report back. If it is extremely unhappy with the agency's choice of a goal, it can pressure the agency to change its goal, sanction the agency, attempt to convince the elected chief executive to change the agency's managers, or enact legislation changing the goal for the current fiscal year.

*Evaluating the achievement of the goal:* After the fiscal year is over, the legislature needs to determine if the goal has been achieved. It can ask the agency for a report, request an audit of that report, and assign some staff to provide its own evaluation of how well the agency did. It can hold hearings to determine if the stakeholders and the general public are satisfied with the agency's performance. Then, if the legislature is unsatisfied with the agency's performance, it can determine the causes and ask the agency to develop a plan to improve performance during the next fiscal year. If it is extremely unhappy with the agency's performance, it can pressure the agency to make specific management changes, sanction the agency, attempt to convince the elected chief executive to change the agency's managers, or enact legislation creating a new and different goal for the next fiscal year.

It seems straightforward to adapt the existing, retrospective mechanisms for establishing accountability for process to the new needs of creating a retrospective mechanism for establishing accountability for results.

Moreover, this generic accountability mechanism is even similar to the way that business

creates accountability for results. The managers of various divisions and other units reach an agreement with their superiors about their goals for the year. This may be subject to more back-and-forth negotiation than might happen between an executive agency and the legislature (though it is clearly a private negotiation). Then, once the fiscal year has begun, upper management monitors each division's performance. And, at the end of the year, it conducts an audit, determines which divisions have met their goals and which have not, take corrective action when necessary, and negotiates new goals for the next year. If a division achieves its goal(s) (and does not do anything illegal) it has been a success ? it has been accountable for its stewardship of the owners' resources and for its broader obligations to society.

This private-sector accountability mechanism consists of agreement about specific goals to be achieved during a specific period, frequent monitoring of progress during the period, and then retrospective evaluation at the end of the period. The only big difference between the public and private mechanisms would be the method for deciding which goal should be pursued by an agency of government or a division of business.

### **The Politics of Process and the Politics of Results**

Why can't accountability for results work exactly like accountability for process? (Why can't accountability for results in government work similarly to accountability for results in business?)

Because process is different from results. (And because business is different from government.) More specifically, the politics of process are different from the politics of results. This quickly becomes obvious in the initial step of establishing specific goals. For again, there is the key question: Whose goals? Who will decide what results are to be produced?

The legislature could, of course, do this. After all, the legislature does establish processes. Sometimes it creates very detailed processes. Sometimes it formulates only general processes and lets the executive branch add more specifics ? all the time reserving the right to oversee, modify, or cancel these specifics. Can't the legislature do for results what it does for process? For example: Sometimes it could create very detailed goals. Sometimes it could formulate only general goals and let the executive branch add more specifics ? all the time reserving the right to oversee, modify, or cancel these specifics. Why doesn't the legislature do this?

Because the legislature does not want to. The legislature as a collective body (and each individual legislator as well) does not want to establish specific goals. As Donald Savoie emphasizes, government's "objectives are unclear because politicians prefer it that way" (1995b, 135). Clarifying objectives is managerially sound but politically irrational. For in clarifying objectives, the politician must choose from among competing constituencies and conflicting values. From experience, elected officials have learned that they can win more praise, support, and votes by being fuzzy about what results it will produce by when than by being clear. One governor once told his department heads: "Never put a number and a date in the same sentence."

Any discussion about a specific target for a specific program or a specific agency for a specific year reintroduces political disagreements that have been carefully minimized by incorporating the vague (rather than precise) purposes into the authorizing legislation. A legislative preamble that outlines general, multiple, and perhaps even contradictory purposes can

make a lot of people happy. The purposes set forth in legislation are not multiple and general because no legislator had a clear idea of what goal he or she wanted to achieve; rather, the preamble contains multiple, general purposes because, although many legislators could identify one or more specific goals to be achieved, they could not agree on a few common ones.

Senator William Roth was the main force behind the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), which is designed to have all federal agencies specify the results they will produce. Roth wanted Congress to establish specific goals for specific agencies. "Under the legislation," wrote Roth:

Federal agencies would be required to develop measurable goals for their programs. I believe we should go one step further, and also require that Congress itself play a direct role in the establishing of at least some of those goals. Congress creates and funds the programs, so it ought to give some indication as to what it expects them to accomplish. . . . Congress has an obligation to tell the American taxpayers what results we intend for the money we spend, and this requirement should be included in the legislation (United States Senate 1993, 57, 59).

Sounds reasonable enough. But Senators and Representatives hastened to decline Roth's invitation. Their debates over vague purposes are contentious enough; they hardly wanted to create even more fractious debates over specific goals.

Still, as GPRA suggests, it may be possible to create accountability for results without having Congress first specify the results to be achieved. The solution may be to have the agencies specify them instead. This, of course, shifts the ticklish burden of choosing between competing purposes and values from the legislative branch to the executive. But at least one legislative body — the United States Congress — has demonstrated its willingness to do precisely this. Maybe other legislatures, under pressure to produce results but still unwilling to specify what results, will find this acceptable as well. The legislature surrenders some influence and control; but it avoids some nasty disagreements.

But will this create accountability? Will this ensure accountability for results? After all, the executive agencies may be just as reluctant as the legislature to create nasty disagreements and the inevitable attacks that come from choosing goals. And so, they too may cheat. The legislature can create a process, a form, and a deadline requiring each agency to specify one or several goals. But the legislature cannot force the agencies to take the requirement seriously or to tackle the task intelligently. Agencies can always choose noncontroversial and nonconsequential goals. They can always choose easily attainable goals. Given all the hoops that legislatures have forced executive agencies to jump through over the years, the agencies have developed a lot of experience at hoop jumping. They can easily figure out how to jump through (or around) this one.

Does the executive branch similarly avoid legislative intent when it creates the rules and regulations that create the framework for process accountability? Not really. For every regulation there is a reason; every regulation is designed to prevent a reoccurrence of a previous error. There is no limit to the number of regulations that either the legislature or the executive can create. Moreover, politically, more regulations are always better. More regulations mean that the agency is ensuring more fairness, more efficiency. More regulations mean that the agency is doing a better job creating fair and efficient processes. Furthermore, the legislature does not resist more regulation. It, itself, seeks more: It creates more on its own; and it presses

the executive to create more too. This is not, however, pressure for more regulation in general; rather the pressure is for a large number of small, individual regulations, all of which add up to more ? a lot more.

Can the same thing happen with goals? Perhaps. An executive agency that is charged with creating goals and that does not want to offend any stakeholders or neglect any values can simply follow the legislature's example: It too can create multiple and vague goals. Then, the legislature must either come up with its own, specific goals or accept the executive's vague ones. And if the legislature gets really insistent, if the legislature demands that the agency pick one and only one goal, the agency can do exactly as requested, choose only one goal, and create precisely the kind of fight the legislature had been trying to avoid.

Process and results have quite different political attributes. The controversies surrounding process are different from the controversies surrounding results. And thus the politics of process are different from the politics of results. Consequently, it may not be easy to make a few, small modifications in the existing accountability mechanisms used for process and have them work smoothly for results.

### *Highlighting Responsibility*

"The two enemies of accountability are unclear objectives and anonymity," writes Sanford Borins. And, he argues in his defense of the new public-management paradigm, "by promoting specificity of goals and by reducing anonymity, the new public management is strengthening accountability" (1995a, 125-126). The importance of establishing and pursuing specific goals is clear. Indeed, the various advocates of a new public-management paradigm may have different paradigms in mind, but they all share a common focus on goals: The job of the public manager is to achieve specific goals. But exactly how will the new public management eliminate anonymity?

Woodrow Wilson well understood the need to eliminate bureaucratic anonymity:

Public attention must be easily directed, in each case of good or bad administration, to just the man deserving of praise or blame. There is no danger in power, if only it be not irresponsible. If it be divided, dealt out in shares to many, it is obscured; and if it be obscured, it is made irresponsible. But if it be centered in heads of the service and in heads of branches of the service, it is easily watched and brought to book (1887, 20).

Yet despite all of Wilson's influence, he did not convince people to create a system of government agencies that highlights responsibility in the heads of each agency and its branches. Why?

Because, I think, organizations that expressly separate politics from administration inherently (if not consciously) obscure all responsibility except at the very top. Politicians are responsible for policy and for everything that flows from policy. The only job of the civil servants is to scientifically carry out that policy. How can they be responsible? (At the same time, how can the person at the head of any agency really be responsible for the behavior of the individuals with civil-service protection who work several layers down in the agency's hierarchy?)

Indeed, bureaucracies are ? almost by definition ? anonymous. Bureaucratic neutrality is almost the same as bureaucratic anonymity. When we visit a government bureaucracy and get angry with a government bureaucrat for applying (neutrally if mindlessly) some silly rule to us, we know (analytically if not emotionally) that we really cannot blame the bureaucrat. Our treatment ? no matter how absurd ? is a consequence not of the bureaucrat's personality. It is the system of rules ? and of punishments for violating those rules ? that have motivated the bureaucrat to behave bureaucratically. Why should the bureaucrat accept responsibility for a system that someone else higher up the hierarchy devised and without ever asking the front-line workers for their suggestions? (At the same time, how can the agency head really be responsible for the application of the rules by individuals with civil-service protection who work several layers down in the agency's hierarchy ? particularly if the rules were imposed by the legislature or some outside regulatory unit?)

A system of specific goals to be achieved during the current fiscal year can highlight a little more responsibility. Whether the goal is established by the legislature or the agency itself, the agency director is responsible for achieving that goal. But the rest of the organization is still off the hook. For what are those at lower levels in the hierarchy responsible? Are they simply responsible for implementing the director's plan for achieving that goal? If so, their life has hardly changed. They remain anonymous and thus are still not responsible. (Again, how can the agency head be responsible for the implementation of the plan by individuals with civil-service protection who work several layers down in the agency's hierarchy?)

Yet, if specific goals can help to eliminate the problem of anonymity at the top levels of an agency, why can't it do the same at lower levels in the hierarchy. After all, everyone is a middle manager. Every manager of every unit has superiors and subordinates. So why not create specific goals for every level of the organization? Such subordinate goals would be tied directly to the organization's overall goal.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, if these subordinate goals were intelligently selected, the organization would simply by achieving all these subordinate goals automatically achieve its overall goal as well.

These lower-level goals need not be reported to the legislature. (They could be, but the legislature would never be able to examine more than a few seriously.) But merely establishing these subordinate goals ? and, perhaps, by posting them everywhere ? an organization would create responsibility at lower levels and thus eliminate anonymity (at least within the organization). Moreover, if something went wrong, if the agency failed to achieve its goal for the fiscal year, the hierarchy of goals would permit the agency (or the legislature) to identify the cause of the failure. If some sub-units failed to achieve their individual goals, then they and their superiors would be responsible. If all sub-units achieved their goals, then the agency's director would be responsible for failing to create a system of subordinate goals whose achievement would produce the agency's overall goal.

Specifying goals helps to eliminate anonymity. Requiring a public agency to have a specific goal to accomplish by the end of the fiscal year highlights its responsibility. Similarly, requiring lower levels in the agency's hierarchy to also have specific goals that they will accomplish by the end of the fiscal year highlights their responsibility as well.<sup>24</sup>

### *Earning the Public's Trust*

"Administration in the United States must be at all points sensitive to public opinion,"

argued Wilson (1887, 21). If, as Finley Peter Dunn, one of Wilson's contemporaries, observed, "th' supreme coort follows th' iliction returns," then certainly civil servants ought to too.

But how sensitive to public opinion ought administration to be? Wilson calls this "the fundamental problem of this whole study" of administration: "What part shall public opinion take in the conduct of administration?" Wilson's answer was that the public should be engaged, but not too engaged:

The problem is to make public opinion efficient without suffering it to be meddlesome. Directly exercised, in the oversight of daily details and in the choice of daily means of government, public criticism is of course a clumsy nuisance, a rustic handling of delicate machinery. But as superintending the greater forces of formative policy alike in politics and administration, public criticism is altogether safe and beneficent, altogether indispensable. Let administrative study find the best means for giving public criticism this control and for shutting it out from all other interference. . . .

The ideal for us is a civil service cultured and self-sufficient enough to act with sense and vigor, and yet so intimately connected with the popular thought, by means of elections and constant public counsel, as to find arbitrariness or class spirit quite out of the question. . . .

. . . comparative studies of the ways and means of government should enable us to offer suggestions which will practicably combine openness and vigor in the administration of such governments with ready docility to all serious, well-sustained public criticism (1887, 20, 21, 22, 24).

And, as Wilson's writing makes clear, striking the right balance is difficult. Moreover, it is even more difficult to create a formal accountability mechanism that always strikes the right balance.

For the new public management, the public has a stake both in the choice of goals and in the achievement of those goals. Thus, any accountability mechanism ought to permit the public to participate in the debate over the choice of goals, and in the monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of those goals.

But how? Will the existing mechanisms of elections be adequate? Will stakeholder organizations be too deeply engaged? Will journalists continue to focus on process? particularly on minor errors in following rules and procedures? Or will the public get engaged in the goals that its municipality sets for its school system, the goals that its state sets for its family support agencies, and the goals that the federal government sets for the nation's network of environmental organizations? Establishing formal systems for public involvement is apt to be less successful than the evolution of patterns in the public's interest in participating in the choice of goals and the monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of those goals.

But the new public management's emphasis on achieving specific goals may have one important effect on the public's attitudes toward government. For much of the public's discontent with its government can be traced to its belief (whether justified or not) that it does not get much from its government, that it does not get its money's worth from its government, that its government cannot produce results. If this is so, then a focus on results? and the creation of a monitoring system that dramatizes the results that different agencies have or have not achieved? may influence the public's thinking. By producing specific results? by achieving



specific, pre-established goals ? public agencies may begin to convince the citizens that government performance is not an oxymoron.

### **The Search for a New Paradigm of Democratic Accountability**

By empowering civil servants to be responsive to citizens, by giving civil servants the authority to make innovative decisions, the advocates of a new public management seek to produce better results. But whose results? Whose results are the better results? Who decides what results government should produce? Who will make sure that who is accountable for producing those results? How will this accountability process work? The advocates of the new public management need not only to demonstrate that their strategy for organizing the administrative apparatus of government is more effective or efficient. They also need to explain how it is (or can be) accountable. They have to be able to answer the accountability question for performance:

Is it possible to permit empowered, responsive civil servants to make decisions and be innovative and still have democratic accountability?

They have yet to do so.

But this is not a trivial task. After all, creating democratic accountability for process has not been easy. We have been working at this for over two centuries and still have not produced a completely satisfactory answer. Indeed, the mechanisms that we have established to ensure accountability for process do not always work.

Furthermore, we will not answer the accountability question for performance by engaging in deep, theoretical thinking. Moreover, we will gain little by debating, legislating, codifying, and staffing formal systems for citizen accountability.

Instead, we will learn the most from a series of *ad hoc* experiments conducted by public managers who seek to be neither cowards nor outlaws but instead to accomplish public purposes that citizens value. Public managers who seek to produce the results that citizens want will be the researchers who will answer the accountability question. Indeed, the answer to the accountability question can only emerge from practice ? evolving from a variety of efforts by the class of new public managers who do not to obscure their accountability but to define and clarify it.

Some of these experiments will be failures. (And, if there are too many failures, the entire effort may be abandoned.) Some, however, may be modest, qualified successes. And upon these modest successes, public managers will design other experiments and produce some more successes. The task of answering the accountability question falls not to the theoreticians of the new public management, but to its practitioners. (As the experiments are being worked out, however, the theoreticians will help to codify the failures, successes, and lessons.)

By definition, these experiments in accountability must, somehow, involve citizens. For the rationale for new public management is that citizens need better performance from government? But what kind of performance? Citizens have a stake both in the choice of goals and in the achievement of these goals. Thus, any accountability mechanism ought to permit the citizens to participate in the debate over the choice of goals, and in the monitoring and

evaluation of the achievement of those goals.

But how? Will the existing systems of elections be adequate? Or will extra-electoral mechanisms be needed? If so, will they be dominated by organized stakeholders? Or will they be irrelevant, with journalists continuing to focus on process ? particularly on minor errors in following rules and procedures? Or is it somehow possible to engage the polity's interest in the goals that its municipality sets for its school system, the goals that its state sets for its family support agencies, and the goals that the federal government sets for the nation's network of environmental organizations?

If so, when do citizens become involved in the choice of goals and in monitoring and evaluating their achievement? In what kind of results and performance are citizens most interested? How do they like to engage in the challenge of choosing, monitoring, and evaluating? How do they prefer to be presented with choices, with data? How can they be engaged but not too engaged? These are the kind of important, operational questions that the experiments with new accountability mechanisms will ask. The answers will only emerge as the experiments evolve.

The traditional systems of accountability were designed to establish and enhance the public's trust in its government's probity. Now we need a new system of accountability to establish and enhance the public's trust in its government's performance. The new public-management paradigm requires a new paradigm of democratic accountability.

## Notes

1..

Elsewhere I have argued that, for the study of public management to be scientific, it should concentrate on "the big questions" (Behn 1995).

2..

There are numerous conceptions of the new public-management paradigm. For descriptions of a few, see: Barzelay (1992), Osborne and Gaebler (1992), Gore (1993), Borins (1995a; 1995b), Public Management Service (1995; 1996), and Thompson, 1997. Borins offers the following definition:

The new public management . . . is a normative reconceptualization of public administration consisting of several inter-related components: providing high-quality services that citizens value; increasing the autonomy of public managers, particularly from central agency controls; measuring and rewarding organization and individuals on the basis of whether they meet demanding performance targets; making available the human and technological resources that managers need to perform well; and, appreciative of the virtues of competition, maintaining an open-minded attitude about which public purposes should be performed by the private sector, rather than the public sector (1995a, 122).

3..

There are various defenses of the traditional, public-administration paradigm (and critiques of the new public management), For a few, see: Frederickson (1992), Moe (1994), Moe and Gilmour (1995), and Savoie (1995a, 1995b).

4..

They may not believe in a "one best way" because they accept that tomorrow's best practice may be better than today's.

5..

Although they never worked together, Wilson, Taylor, and Weber were of the same generation. Wilson and Taylor were born in 1856, Weber in 1864. Thus, it is not surprising that their beliefs and recommendations about administration should be so compatible. They were not merely shaping the nation's opinions; they were also reporting on them. They were not merely creating ideas; their ideas also reflected the culture and needs of the times. As Fry observes of Taylor's scientific management, it "was clearly a movement right for its time" (1989, 68). In many ways, Wilson, Taylor, and Weber did not so much lead the thinking of their age as reflect it.

Wilson's writings, for example, previewed both Taylor's scientific management and Goodnow's advocacy of separating politics from administration. Wilson may have been the first to suggest in a publication that the implementation of policy needed to be separated from its creation, but he was not alone. Indeed, although Wilson became actively engaged in American politics, his essay on "The Study of Administration" (1887) was not well known for decades. Much more influential in establishing the politics-administration dichotomy was Frank Goodnow's book, *Politics and Administration*, published thirteen years later (1900).

In his essay, Wilson also advocated the creation of a "science of administration," but it was Taylor who not only undertook to do that, but also to convince the country of its utility. Indeed, of the three, only Taylor aggressively sought to convince the American public of the value of

his ideas about administration.

And Weber's thinking was not easily available in the United States until after World War II, when Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills translated and published a collection of Weber's writings (1946) and A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons did the same (Weber 1947). Yet this did not prevent American businesses and governments from creating large bureaucracies very similar to those that Weber advocated.

6.. When government consciously creates a policy that is designed to treat people differently ? e.g. affirmative action ? it is difficult to evaluate the fairness of the implementation. Thus, both the policy and implementation will be accused of being unfair.

7.. Some believe that this direct accountability is not direct enough. Thus, they created the initiative and the referendum ? just in case our representatives do not establish the policies that we really want.

8.. Yet, even though Wilson proclaimed his distinction to be "too obvious to need further discussion," he also confessed that it was not obvious exactly where the line ran until you looked at the particulars of the particular policy issue:

One cannot easily make clear to every one just where administration resides in the various departments of any practicable government without entering upon particulars so numerous as to confuse and distinctions so minute as to distract. No lines of demarcation, setting apart administrative from non-administrative functions, can be run between this and that department of government without being run up hill and down dale, over dizzy heights of distinction and through dense jungles of statutory enactment, hither and thither around 'ifs' and 'buts,' 'whens' and 'howevers' until they become altogether lost to the common eye not accustomed to this sort of surveying, and consequently not acquainted with the use of the theodolite of logical discernment (1887, 18-19).

Thus, writes Thorsen, "Wilson explicitly regarded the separation of administration from politics as a practical matter to be settled when concrete issues arose in the course of changing governmental functions and techniques" (1988, 119).

9.. Taylor believed, reports Fry, "that every man is a first-class workman at some kind of work." Thus, it was also management's responsibility to determine the job for which each worker was most suited (1989, 53-54).

10.. Weber saw private and public bureaucracies as being essentially similar: "The idea that the bureau activities of the state are intrinsically different in character from the management of private economic offices is a continental European notion and, by the way of contrast, is totally foreign to the American way" (1946, 82).

- 11..  
Elsewhere (Behn 1997, 17), I have asked what it really means to hold government accountable:
- When we hold someone or some organization accountable for something, what do we really do? In some ways, it means that we want to be able to identify who is responsible for the organization's outputs or outcomes, for its successes or failures. But then what? That answer does not really clarify things. What does it mean to hold people responsible for success? What does it mean to hold people responsible for failure?
- I know of no definitive answer, either theoretical or empirical. But I bet I know what the managers who are to be held accountable think. I bet they believe, from their own, empirical experience, that 'holding people accountable' means that when they fail they are punished and that when they succeed nothing significant happens.
- 12..  
Borins argues: "In areas where coordination is needed, it is becoming increasingly evident that informal coordination and partnerships are a better alternative than central coordination" (1995, 125).
- 13..  
For a discussion for accountability within networks ? or within what they call "collaboratives" ? see Bardach and Lesser (1996).
- 14..  
Altshuler argues that elected officials have little incentive to engage in the oversight of public agencies ? that there are a lot more useful ways for them to spend their time (1997).
- 15..  
Indeed, this is what the advocates of interest-group liberalism have done ? attempted to put a good face on reality.
- 16..  
Organized advocates will prefer policies that concentrate benefits on them and, to avoid mobilizing opposition, that either hide or diffuse the costs. If the advocates of a new public-management paradigm want to focus the attention of government on results, they will need to define who, exactly, will be responsible for implementing an accountability process that focuses on not only the achievement of those specific results but also on the achievement of those results in a way that is efficient in the direct use of public resources and does not impose other, indirect costs.
- 17..  
In recent years, political organizations that care deeply about one, single public policy have been able to utilize effectively the traditional accountability process of elections. They have ignored the overall collection of policies, chosen among candidates based on their position on this one, important issue, and then set out to elect those with whom they agree and defeat those with whom they differ. And yet such single-issue organizations are denounced as a perversion of the democratic process.

- 18..  
If it fails to make its disagreements clear on a selected number of issues ? be they important or not ? the opposition will have a difficult time explaining to the electorate why it should replace the party in power.
- 19..  
Of course, some cooks are quite happy to be left no discretion as to the management of the fires and the ovens. For without discretion, there can be no responsibility. This is why many cooks ? many middle managers and front-line workers ? do not want to be empowered. For to empower people is to give them responsibility. The fear of empowerment is the fear of responsibility.
- 20..  
Wow! A hundred-and-ten years ago, Woodrow Wilson succinctly summarized the principal-agent problem.
- 21..  
When Senator William Proxmire would give out his monthly "Golden Fleece Award" to public agencies that wasted the taxpayers' money, he discovered that he got more attention when he gave them for small, easily understood examples of government waste than for large complicated ones (Behn 1991a, 114).
- 22..  
Of course, there are a number of reasons why public managers do not want to set specific goals, including their fear of responsibility.
- 23..  
This was the case in the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare in the mid 1980s. The department had ten goals, and each division and each unit within each division also had its own goals (Behn 1991a, ch. 4).
- 24..  
This suggestion does not solve the network problem; it does not eliminate the anonymity of the various components of the network. But it could. If a network accepted responsibility for a given program or policy, it too would be asked to create a specific goal for the network to achieve by the end of the fiscal year. Then, it could ask each component of the network to create its own goal for the fiscal year. Then, if the network failed to achieve its fiscal-year goal, this network of goals would highlight responsibility ? either on the individual components of the network that failed to achieve their own goals, or on the leadership of the network that failed to create a network of goals whose achievement would automatically result in the realization network's overall goal. But before we try using subordinate goals to highlight responsibility and enhance accountability with networks, we ought to see if we can make it work in more hierarchical organizations. For a discussion of accountability in networks (or, as they call them, "collaboratives"), see Bardach and Lesser (1996).

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