

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

[In the United States, there is a widely held belief that] providence has given to each individual, whoever he may be, the degree of reason necessary for him to be able to direct himself in things that interest him exclusively. . . . Extended to the entirety of the nation, it becomes the dogma of the sovereignty of the people. . . . In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of that one. Among the laws that rule human societies, there is one that seems more precise and clear than all the others. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among men in the same ratio as equality of condition increases. (Alexis de Tocqueville 2000, 381, 492)

The battle between bureaucracy and democracy is written into our history. So is the fact that democracy must win. All we have left to debate is the cost. (Barry Karl 1987, 34)

We begin this final chapter by reviewing three central themes of this book. First, public administration has played a significant role in shaping the course of American democratic governance. Especially over the last 100 years it has contributed to the development and implementation of public policy at all levels of government and operates as a powerful agent of efficiency and effectiveness. We have articulated its role as a Democratic Balancewheel—juggling competing values that inform our traditions of governance. This role is especially prominent at local levels where part-time elected officials rely on career administrators to carry

out their electoral responsibilities. We end this book by asking how this balancewheel role can be effectively carried out in the future.

As we observed in chapter 1, most Americans are satisfied with their encounters with administrative agencies. Yet, Americans are also openly skeptical about the capacity of administrative agencies to meet public expectations. This skepticism is reflected in the 9/11 debates involving the bombings of the Twin Towers, the handling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Iraq War, and post-9/11 efforts to protect Americans from terrorist threats. In response to these concerns, we have witnessed swift executive action to obtain more centralized control over federal agencies, resulting in significant politicization, retirement of many senior career administrators, and extensive privatization, reorganization, and deregulation. The reforms run deep; they presume that old administrative practices are obsolete and that administrative capacity should be lean and minimal. With the election of a Democratic-controlled Congress in the fall of 2006, we witnessed efforts by Congress to pare back executive reach and reverse some intrusions on longstanding administrative policies and practices. While these battles continue at the federal level, the growth of state and local administration to meet demand for public services proceeds steadily as federal support declines.

The debate over who owns or controls the public administration reflects a second major theme of this book. Public administrators operate within a context that establishes sovereignty of the people as the first principle of governance. In operationalizing popular sovereignty, however, the framers tempered it with significant institutional protections of individual rights, and ensured responsiveness to competing claims and powers emanating from co-equal branches and divided structures of federal, state, and local governance. Administrators help maintain the balance of powers among the political principals who populate this complex structure. Their balancing role

is critical to the integrity of American governance. It is noteworthy, for instance, that throughout the rapid mobilization for war in Iraq and defense at home, career administrators voiced concerns about retaining the integrity of administrative standards, judgments, and processes. Many of them expressed doubt about hasty projections and impulsive modifications to practices that were carefully built to accommodate balance among competing values. Subsequent assessments indicate that many of their doubts were well founded.

Events such as these give rise to a third major theme of this book. New generations of public administrators need to understand the enduring conflicts at the heart of American governance in order to fully grasp the nature of their roles and competencies. Across more than 230 years of history, the American people have embraced a variety of models of acceptable administration, ranging from very constrained roles at one end of the spectrum to broad and aggressive roles at the other. The public's ongoing ambivalence about public administration is part and parcel of a deeper concern for the exercise of governmental power which is reflected in the complex structure of authority built into the American system.

Simplistic theories of public administration portray it as a mere instrument of the will of elected officials (see chapters 3, 4 and 5). While such portrayals are certainly expedient for elected officials, they hardly capture the logic of diffuse and balanced power that permeates all of our governments. In actual practice, American public administration resembles a co-production model that mixes subordination to multiple principals with varying dosages of professional autonomy. The ethical and legal theories that underpin this system (summarized in chapters 5 and 13) give public administration substantial discretion that is structured through a variety of accountability mechanisms. Legal authority recognizes that administrative agencies serve three separate masters—elected chief executives, legislative bodies, and courts—all of

which operate under the supervening authority of a Constitution that also divides power by level of government.

As we move into the twenty-first century, public administration remains saddled with contradictory roles that require balancing competing values. Responsiveness, competent performance, protection of rights, and sensitivity to community values are vital traditions in American democratic governance. We have argued that the Democratic Balancewheel presented in chapter 5 provides an appropriate anchor for public administrators at all levels of government as they work to preserve a regime of ordered liberty. In this final chapter, we explore the adequacy of this model in dealing with challenges that loom on the horizon. We start by reviewing some major demographic, technologic, economic, and political factors that will drive change, and then, through a real case, illustrate how administrators can use the model to cope with them.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The forces of change that loom large on the horizon present opportunities as well as challenges. Public servants need deal with their implications for responsible and effective democratic governance. Dealing with the looming forces of change will require leadership at many levels, some of it strategic in the sense of shaping the course of events rather than falling victim to them. Others who lead will help us cope with difficulties that arise suddenly and unexpectedly. In either case, career administrators must attend to the capacities of public institutions (including nonprofit organizations and private firms that serve public functions) to sustain a regime of ordered liberty, and to promote calm and deliberate action that steadies our resolve to work through our problems in a civil and respectable manner. This is a noble challenge, one that many

public servants already understand and take pride in as they perform their duties. The challenges they face make their work interesting and worthwhile, even under dire circumstances. One should bear this in mind as the next generation of public servants assumes the responsibilities of those who went before them.

Workforce Changes

Public sector organizations currently face major issues due to retirements, workforce transition, and succession planning. Rapid turnover will continue as an issue for at least the next decade. The General Accounting Office (GAO) reports that 53 percent of the middle managers in the federal workforces will qualify for retirement by 2004 (GAO 2001). Likewise, retirements and staffing turnovers place critical burdens on state, county, and city governments whose employees constitute 60 percent of public employment (Ehrenhalt 1999, 19–22). These changes pose obvious problems of preserving institutional memory, sustaining best practices, and transferring to successors the subtleties of maintaining collaborative operating agreements among multiple powers and jurisdictions. This is especially true in local communities, where most of the work is carried out through partnerships and other collaborative mechanisms among public, nonprofit, and for-profit institutions. Implied promises made to stakeholder groups, expectations of the sequencing of public service projects when funding becomes available, and similar kinds of agreements make it possible for social capital to be built and sustained over time. Without continuity of leadership, this capital is in danger of being lost.

Succession planning poses additional challenges for identifying and acquiring the kinds of abilities that will be needed in the future. While high levels of technical competence are assumed, they are not going to be sufficient in a decentralized, globalized world of fractured

jurisdictions. The flattening of public organizations, increased emphasis on customer service, and the need to build collaborative partnerships at the lower ranks of the organization place much greater emphasis on recruiting individuals who have the capacity to make sense out of muddles, to deal with ambiguity, and to stay calm in conflict-ridden settings. This has always been the case for those occupying leadership positions in the upper ranks of the public service, but these qualities are now increasingly required at lower ranks. Robert Reich finds these qualities in new kinds of workers that he calls “symbolic analysts.”

Symbolic analysts solve, identify, and broker problems by manipulating symbols. They simplify reality into abstract images that can be rearranged, juggled, experimented with, communicated to other specialists, and then, eventually, transformed back into reality. The manipulations are done with analytic tools, sharpened by experience. The tools may be mathematical algorithms, legal arguments, financial instruments, scientific principles, psychological insights about how to persuade or amuse, systems of induction or deduction, or any other set of techniques for doing conceptual puzzles (Reich 1992, 178).

It would be a mistake to assume that these symbolic analysts are trained exclusively in some new kind of specialty. They may know how to use a variety of specialized tools, but they also know how to integrate their application, to synthesize them with a broader context of ideas and principles. They become generalists who can integrate a broad view with the details and specific needs of administrative, political, and information systems. Undergraduate liberal arts majors are well suited for this kind of work. They are prized for their ability to think, and for their broad, interdisciplinary knowledge. But the rapidly increasing need for such abilities suggests that career officials trained in highly technical subjects such as nursing, medicine, engineering, social work, natural resource management, or the justice fields should look to

graduate and continuing education to generalize their perspectives, build symbolic logic skills, and cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity. This presents a challenge to graduate and continuing education programs to rethink and adapt their curricula to this pressing need. Those programs focused on public affairs education are perhaps best situated to address the problem.

The bad news is that public organizations must compete for the same skill set that the private sector increasingly finds necessary to maintain a competitive market edge. As we noted in chapters 7 and 8, governments in the United States are ill prepared to compete in this market for talent. The negative attitudes about government service have taken a huge toll on the ability to attract and hold onto the kind of people who can meet the challenges of the future.

Growing Demographic and Ethnic Diversity

In the years ahead, most local communities will grow in size and will be composed of an older and more diverse group of citizens. Between 1990 and 2000, nearly 33 million people were added to the national population. This was the largest 10-year increase in U.S. history. The fastest growing regions were the sunbelt areas of the West and the South. Projecting to the year 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that America will remain predominantly “white” but that other groups will continue to increase disproportionately. Perhaps the most dramatic result of these changing population trends during the last few years has been that African Americans were replaced by Hispanics as the largest minority group. This is the result of large numbers of immigrants entering the country from Latin America and high birth rates among first-generation Hispanics.

The patterns of diversity are not the same throughout America. Most ethnic and racial minorities are concentrated in major urban centers and in particular states. For instance,

Hispanics of Mexican ancestry have their highest populations in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. While they make up only 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, Hispanics now constitute 32.4 percent of California's population, with 77.1 percent being of Mexican heritage. Greater Los Angeles is, in effect, the second largest Mexican city—only Mexico City has a larger Mexican population. Half of all U.S. Hispanics live in California and Texas; however, the presence of people with Hispanic ancestry is now growing rapidly outside of the Southwest as well. This is particularly true in New York City, Chicago, and major farming regions such as the upper Midwest and the Yakima Valley in Washington State. In June 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that the Hispanic population in the country had grown to 38.8 million people. That is a phenomenal increase of nearly 10 percent in only two years (since the 2000 U.S. Census). It amounts to half of the growth in population for the entire United States during that period. Higher Hispanic birth rates and immigration are primarily responsible for this trend (Alba and Nee 2005).

The impact of this diversity on local communities will vary, but issues of race and ethnicity are becoming a growing priority for public administrators. There are two visions that have governed the debate over the relevance of minority group identity in the United States. One vision begins with a normative *assimilation* framework, which assumes that the melting pot model experience of European immigrants is the preferable public policy objective. However, this model is challenged by a *multicultural* alternative, which argues that assimilation is neither possible nor desirable for the kind and character of diversity present in many American communities. First, most European immigrants have been able to assimilate within the first or second generations due to their similarity in physical appearance to the majority population. People with darker skin color have not been able to assimilate as readily or at all in some cases.

This has been particularly true of African Americans and some Hispanics. As a result, assimilation is now often rejected as a goal by “minorities of color” in favor of gaining respect and acceptance as economically and politically equal but separate ethnic groups.

Second, many point out that the assimilation model works best when the size and concentration of ethnic groups is small. However, when the ethnic group is large and when it insulates its members from the dominant cultural patterns of the national society, the assimilation model does not work so easily, as is born out by the history of large concentrations of ethnic groups in the larger U.S. cities. This has been the case with many African American communities, Mexicans and Central Americans in eastern and southern Los Angeles, and some of the Vietnamese who arrived in the United States in the 1970s and settled in urban areas rather than in small towns. In situations like these, pressures to assimilate are often ignored (Rodriguez 2003).

Those Americans who favor a society that acknowledges the permanent existence of unassimilated or only partially assimilated ethnic/racial minorities generally advocate multiculturalism (or pluralism). This is essentially a celebration and encouragement of continued diversity, similar to the policy introduced by Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in 1972 to describe the acceptance of a permanently unassimilated French-speaking society in Quebec Province. Today, multiculturalism in Canada is a deep-rooted policy at every level of government and has been expanded to cover all ethnic groups. For many, this serves as the model to be emulated in the United States.

There are those like Richard Rodriguez, a leading American essayist and social commentator, who argues that the debate between the multiculturalism and melting pot models is largely irrelevant. Constant close contact between people of different ethnic and racial groups in

the United States is progressively resulting in a blurring of the differences between them.

Rodriguez suggests that Americans are melting into each other genetically and culturally. More and more children are being born with two or more different ethnic or racial backgrounds. He refers to this as the “browning of America.” He is not only referring to skin color, but to the development of a distinct national culture by borrowing from each other and thereby creating a new cultural synthesis. Rodriguez points to the recent experience of Hawaii and the southwestern states as examples of this homogenizing of people and their cultures into something distinctively new (2003).

In addition to browning, local communities are also graying. By 2025, the baby boomers born in 1955 will be 70. Just less than 20 percent of the U.S. population will be younger than 15, slightly less than today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The middle of the age spectrum will hollow out, and the number of those 65 and older will swell from 12.4 percent of the population to 18.2 percent. The nation in 2025 is projected to have 43 Social Security beneficiaries for every 100 workers. The graying of America will result in important changes in the configuration of local communities as resources in all sectors are shifted toward health care clinics, home health services, hearing aid providers, hospitals and hospital equipment stores, physical therapists, and residential care facilities.

Future public servants will be challenged by the “graying” and “browning” of America to craft and implement policies that take into account the unique age, cultural, and language needs of various subpopulations. This will be especially true in the delivery of social services and public education, where scarcity of resources is already straining the capacity of public service systems to meet existing needs.

The Growth of Income Inequality

The gap between the rich and the poor in the United States has grown at an accelerating rate over the past several decades. Between 1979 and 2000 “the real income of households in the lowest fifth (the bottom 20% of earners) grew 6.4%, while that of households in the top fifth (the top 20% of earners) grew 70%, with the top 1% achieving real income gains of 184%. In contrast, during the 1950’s and 1960’s real income almost doubled for all groups.” (Mishel 2005, 2). In a report titled *The State of Working America*, (2004–05), the Economic Policy Institute estimated that the bottom 80 percent of American households control only about 16 percent of the nation’s wealth. Meanwhile, wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers at the bottom continue to decrease (Mishel 2005, 12). The United States ranks last among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations in terms of income equality.

Since 2000, the number of poor Americans has grown by more than 4 million. The official poverty rate in 2003 was 12.5 percent, up from 12.1 percent in 2002. Americans falling below official poverty thresholds numbered 35.9 million—1.3 million higher than in 2002 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).¹ The official poverty rate in 2000 (11.3 percent) was about the same as 1973 (11.1 percent) despite the fact that real capital income grew 66 percent over the same period (Mishel 2005, 12). Any changes in the poverty rate since 1981 are almost entirely the result of marketplace forces, not the result of any changes in the tax system or transfers payments to the poor (Mishel 2005, 339–40).

While the Census Bureau figures reveal a significant number of Americans living in poverty, many experts argue that the measures used by the federal government drastically underestimate the real scale of poverty in America—primarily because the official poverty thresholds are considered “too low.” The Economic Policy Institute believes a more realistic

poverty threshold for a family of four would be in the area of \$30,000 a year—and that a more accurate estimate of the poverty rate in America would be 30 percent of the total population (Mishel 2005, 12).

There are clear implications for administrators of the growing income gap between the bottom and top of the economic spectrum. Politically it means heightened tension between the haves and the have-nots, and this can easily spawn grassroots movements seeking to address the multiple problems of the poor, including jobs, housing, health care and wages. Wide disparities of wealth in democratic societies typically lead to political instability. Administratively, in a time of strained resources, the social service needs of the community are competing against other basic services like education, police, fire, water, and prisons. Even when some of these services are provided by a cost of service approach, the customers paying these costs do not clearly separate their tax bill from their water, sewer, or other bills for a designated service. Citizens experience an undifferentiated increase in the costs of government. This places public servants in the unenviable position of finding more creative ways of explaining the larger public interest in unpopular programs or in programs that serve a limited clientele with special needs. These problems inevitably bleed into the broader political upheavals associated with such great disparities.

Permanent Fiscal Crisis with Increased Emphasis on Managing for Results

It is likely that U.S. governments will face continued fiscal stress for the foreseeable future (Osborne and Hutchinson 2004). The comptroller general of the United States, David M. Walker, has been signaling the alarm for several years over rising debt, growing costs of entitlements, and ownership of the U.S. debt by China and Japan. Walker estimates that if the present U.S.

rates of spending and taxation continue, the U.S. Government will be bankrupt by the year 2040 (Walker 2007). The continuing taxpayer revolt makes significant tax increases an unlikely solution. The proliferation of local government jurisdictions and special districts exacerbates the problem by fracturing the political will and the economic resources that could be pooled to help cope with the crisis.

The failure to deal with the crisis at the national level will result in increased pressure on career administrators to coordinate with other jurisdictions for tax levies, for service consolidation, and for educating citizens on what they are getting for the taxes they pay. Pressures will increase to do more with less or to provide the same levels of service while cutting expenditures. At some point, it will no longer be possible to continue operating programs at meaningful levels of service. Elected officials risk their careers when trying to remedy this situation with tax increases. Career administrators will need to take a leadership role in convincing both the public and elected officials when public institutions reach the breaking point and what programs will be salvageable with the funds available.

The scarcity of public funding often pushes public administrators to the nonprofit and commercial sectors in the search for alternative funding. On the positive side, moving beyond the public sector opens opportunities for broader public and advocacy group support for public projects. For example, funding for the construction of new buildings and programs on many public university campuses demonstrates a blending of minimal levels of state support with extensive support from private foundations, escalating tuition and fees from students, and enterprise revenues from the private commercial sector.

Proliferation of Governmental Jurisdictions and Overlapping Structures of Authority

Local jurisdictions have grown dramatically since the 1960s. The willingness to accommodate the desire of citizens to live in enclaves that protect them from the perceived adverse consequences of growth, increased taxes, and undesirable diversity (socioeconomic, ethnic, racial) has resulted in the creation of a complex array of local governing institutions. The pressures that have created these governing entities are not going to dissipate in the foreseeable future. In fact, they will likely increase. As a result, local jurisdictions are preoccupied with issues of taxes and tax bases, annexation, infrastructure provision, land improvement, zoning, and provision of services. These issues place a premium on managing interjurisdictional relationships, and they will grow in importance as jurisdictions are forced to cooperate in managing shrinking resources and accommodating increased demands from citizens for accountability and documented results. These pressures will likely lead to efforts at consolidating administrative functions to reduce overhead costs and increase efficiencies in maintenance, information technology, and purchasing. The current push for decentralization will cycle into recentralization. Evidence for this already exists in the nonprofit sector delivery of social services, where small nonprofits are banding together or are being swallowed by larger entities in order to sustain or improve capacity.

Confounding of the Lines between Public, Nonprofit, and Private Sectors

The United States was founded on a rule-of-law system that drew a bright-line distinction between the authority of government and the freedom of individuals to pursue their own life course. Civil society and the private market economy are products of individuals freely choosing to associate and organize with others without undue interference from government. This

principle is memorialized in the First Amendment right of individuals to worship, to assemble, and to be free from government regulation based on the views and beliefs they hold. Government is free to regulate the time, place, and manner of the exercise of one's liberty, but not the content. This right has been extended to businesses as well as individuals, which has made it legally difficult for government to regulate commercial speech differently than noncommercial speech, or to treat the property rights of corporate entities differently than the property rights of individuals. Corporate entities and associations are composed of individuals whose freedom becomes meaningful through the aegis of organizations.

However, this popularly held belief in a bright line between government and the other sectors is more myth than reality. As we have argued throughout this book, the various sectors are mutually interdependent and have become what they are largely through a co-dependent and mutually interactive process of development. The faith-based initiatives of the George W. Bush Administration (Executive Order 13199, Jan. 31, 2001) intentionally challenged the bright line between government and faith-oriented organizations in the nonprofit sector. The initiatives provide avenues of federal government support to churches and other faith-based groups for the provision of social services, while legal challenges continue to test for a clearer separation between government and the nonprofit sector.

The line between the government, commercial, and nonprofit sectors is also quite porous. For example, the subsidized infrastructure developed by government has made it possible for commerce to thrive. Government uses its contracting authority to enhance the private sector by forbidding public bodies from competing with the private business sector, giving preferences to minority and small businesses, and imposing other restrictions to enable the private and nonprofit sectors to prosper. But government can also use its authority in ways that undermine both the

business and nonprofit sectors and obscure public accountability. These concerns have been at the center of the debate over the decline in legitimacy of the administrative state in the last decades of the twentieth century. As public servants continue to be called upon to rethink the relationship among the sectors, they need to take a leadership role in keeping the right questions at the center of the debate. How do these relationships cultivate healthy growth in each sector? How do they tend to enervate the animating spirit in one sector or another? These issues and concerns are likely to grow rather than decrease in importance in the decades ahead.

The New Public Management and Reinvention of Government movements in the last decades of the twentieth century altered the assumptions about the role of government in organizing and delivering public services. Most governmental entities have accepted the argument that the for-profit and nonprofit sectors can play important roles in co-producing, or even taking over, provision of many government services. Reliance on third-party governance is thus likely to continue growing (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 1–11; Salamon 1999 chap. 5).

One of the less well-known developments in recent years is the deliberate creation of hybrid organizations, what are sometimes called *quasi-governmental organizations* (“quagos”) and *quasi-nongovernmental organizations* (“quangos”). The federal government has created 300 of these in the last few decades (Moe and Kosar 2005). While these agencies carry out government-sponsored activities and provide money or mechanisms for funding government activities, they operate outside the legal authority of Title 5 of the *U.S. Code*. This means that they cannot be held accountable through the traditional tools of executive oversight such as the budget and general management laws. The supporters of this trend argue that the goal is “to maximize performance and results”; critics argue that these organizations contribute to a

weakened “capacity of government to perform its fundamental constitutional duties, and to an erosion of political accountability” (Moe and Kosar 2005).

Deliberation over the reliance on third parties to provide governmental services has sparked renewed interest in key questions that formed the core of the constitutional debate in 1787: What role should government play in a democratic society? How can that role be assured under a rule-of-law system? For the foreseeable future, public administrators will participate in answering these questions at every level of American democratic government, particularly as they are called upon at the local level to use the nonprofit and private sectors for the delivery of public services.

Ensuring the Vitality of Nonprofit Organizations

There are some well-documented adverse consequences on nonprofits that arise from government contracting, many of which we have touched on in our discussion of “The Rise and Transformation of the Nonprofit Sector” in chapter 4 (see pp. 158 ff.). In order to comply with government accountability standards, nonprofits may have to fundamentally alter the structure, staffing, and operations of their activities. In the process, they may weaken their capacity to carry out the role we traditionally expect them to perform in civil society. Instead of being composed of passionate volunteers who devote their energy to the service of a single clientele group, nonprofits get transformed into co-dependent businesses operated by professionals. This co-dependency generally moves in one of two directions, neither of which bodes well for the autonomy and independence of either party to the contract. On the one hand, nonprofits may begin to resemble some defense industry subcontractors who manage their business and their relationship to government as a foster child of a court-supervised parent. On the other, an

increasing number of contractees become so powerful that they effectively co-opt public agencies, thus undermining their capacity to serve as potential sources of meaningful social and institutional change (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 5; Berry and Arons 2003, chap. 5). Public accountability and open access is threatened by such arrangements.

Insuring Deliberation over the Public Interest

A less-noticed consequence of relying on the contracting process to deliver public services is that it removes the debate over the social-service needs of the community from public view during annual budget deliberations. The contracting process transfers issues over the level and quality of needed services to the “business agenda,” a technical matter governed by the legal complexities of contracts. Critics of this approach remind us that the purpose of public deliberations is to engage the community in a debate over the multiple, competing and complex political goals of the community. This deliberative process requires balancing competing values: meeting the needs of the most vulnerable members of society (Smith and Lipsky 1993), maintaining legal accountability to both legislative and executive authorities, balancing the need for individual citizen access and responsiveness with the need for collective action, and facilitating citizen-centered governance that is informed by wisdom and expertise (R. Moe 1994; Moe and Gilmour 1995; Box, 199). Relying on the contracting process to deliver public services obscures these trade-off issues, removing them from public discussion. And, perhaps as importantly, those served by the contracting process often become an invisible part of the community, out of sight and out of mind.

Maintaining Public Accountability

A final concern that arises from reliance on third parties to provide public services is the lack of public accountability. As the recent contract administration experiences of the Iraq War remind us, when public bodies decide to contract out for services or establish quasi-governmental bodies, oversight is shifted away from elected, deliberative bodies to the contract specialists in accounting and law. This concern for accountability is especially important when the government is giving its power to providers who administer to the needs of the most vulnerable populations: prisoners, juveniles, drug addicts, foster children, and the like. Government control and manipulation of vulnerable populations proceeds properly only when sanctioned by deliberate democratic processes and safeguards. Contracting gives away responsibility for important authoritative decisions about at-risk segments of society. Program monitoring and auditing are often rudimentary and inadequate for assuring program compliance and maintenance of standards. The policy system interposes courts as institutions that alone can make the most important decisions—to deprive people of their liberty or take children from their homes. But in a thousand ways, service workers act at the margin to make fateful decisions about people; or their reports constitute the primary evidence upon which judges rely (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 11–12). In the years ahead, administrative leaders will play a decisive role in determining whether reliance on third-party organizations to deliver public services is carried out in a manner that meets the multiple tests of democratic governance: responsiveness, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and equity (Cooper 2002).

The Increasing Reliance on Technology, and the Potential of E-Government

The rapid growth of the information age has contradictory consequences for the work of government. On the one hand, it arms everyone with access to more information and provides them with the opportunity to share this information more widely with one another. But more information does not mean more knowledge and better informed decision making. Excessive information can create information overload and pose increased challenges for sorting and ordering the array of information in ways that create relevance and meaning for the common work of the community. Data overload can produce confusion, conflict and indecisiveness.

More information that is widely available can exacerbate the problems of deliberation over the common good in other ways. As groups organize around ever-narrower agendas and mobilize support to make their interests a reality, it can make the work of building a community consensus more difficult to develop and sustain. The challenge is to use the technology in ways that enhance the possibility of creating a shared sense of community, rather than having it used to further divide the community. From a Madisonian viewpoint, which favors a multiplicity of interests, one might argue that the proliferation of information-centered technology ameliorates the adverse effects of faction. As more and more groups organize around ever-narrower interests, the dangers of tyranny of the majority diminish. But the Madisonian vision of interest group pluralism also assumes that the work of government itself would require the “regulation of these various and interfering interests,” which Madison argued, “forms the principal task of modern legislation and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government. . . . It is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests and render them all subservient to the common good” (The Federalist No. 10).

An important ingredient to making the regulation of the clash of interests work is “to refine and enlarge the public views by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the country and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations” (The Federalist No. 10). Madison’s medium—legislative bodies—have not met his expectations (see discussion of representation in chapter 5). We believe the career administrative service substantially augments this process. This is especially true in local governments, where the part-time status of legislative bodies makes it impossible for administrators to perform this vital role. Administrative hearings and public processes provide a much underutilized avenue for creating a shared sense of the public good, or at least for countering what Madison characterized as “partial consideration.”

FRAMING THE FUTURE: PRESERVING THE CONTINUITIES IN CONFLICT

What does the future hold for public service in the face of these drivers of change? We cannot know the answer to this question with any degree of confidence, but one thing is certain: future public administrators will play a major role in helping the American people cope with such changes and in shaping their meaning. It is important that administrators possess the tools necessary to perform this role. In addition to being technically proficient and grounded in the critical values of political society, they must be able to synthesize the factors outlined above into realistic scenarios around which information can be organized, alternatives analyzed, and elected officials and citizens galvanized to undertake creative and collaborative problem solving.

One of the tools we have found useful in assisting administrators in this process is called *scenario thinking*. It was first introduced as *shell-group planning* in the 1970s and now operates

under a variety of different names. Scenario thinking assumes that decision making takes place in a fast-changing and highly uncertain environment, where values, behaviors, and social structures are no longer as stable and predictable as they once were. Under these circumstances, traditional planning and forecasting practices on their own are not sufficient in obtaining insights and answers about how to deal with future events.

The goal of scenario thinking is to get participants to think about and anticipate an unknown future, without any pretences that they will be able to predict or control the future. The process begins with identification of the relevant drivers of change. It then asks participants to assess the interplay of these drivers. Assessment is less about obtaining quantitative certainty and more about understanding the “logic” of these forces as they come together to create new waves of change. This process is not unlike what white-water rafting enthusiasts and fly fishermen do when reading the many currents, eddies, and swirls in a fast-flowing river. They need to be clear about where they want to end up, knowing that they can’t alter the forces of change. To accomplish this, they can only read the waters so that the ride of their watercraft or fly is carried as safely and smoothly as possible through the currents to obtain the results they want. The goal of scenario thinking is to encourage participants to proactively think and plan for future developments as they are buffeted by drivers of change (Ringland 2002); Van der Heijden 2005; Bonnet and Olson 1993).

We end this book with an example of scenario thinking in a community envisioning process. The example nicely illustrates the central theme with which we began: career public servants help make democracy work. Career administrators occupy unique positions that enable them to maintain continuity over time and provide the institutional support necessary for making democracy meaningful in the daily lives of citizens. With these positions comes an obligation

that helps preserve the integrity of America's many governing systems—an obligation to work through changes in the future. This obligation requires the balancing of competing values, which is a challenging but not impossible task, as the following story of the Vision Action Network illustrates. This case developed over more than 15 years. It started as a final project for a master's degree in public administration. The authors were senior administrators who carried a dream, and gradually transformed it into a reality as they guided the work of a local jurisdiction. It shows how collaborative governance, despite its many difficulties, can still attract and inspire citizens and officials to pursue worthy goals.

Doing What Is Right for Juan Gomez

This is the story of the creation of a community-wide collaborative entity. It came about through leadership undertaken by career administrators in one of the richest and fastest-growing counties in Oregon. What is especially noteworthy about this case is that the community collaboration process was inspired by the plight of Juan Gomez, one of the community's most needy and at-risk residents.

Juan Gomez is a 14-year-old boy who has lived his entire life in Cascadia County. He comes from a single-parent home headed by his mother, Consuela, who has a history of alcohol abuse and of choosing abusive partners. His father returned to El Salvador when Juan was very young. Consuela's current boyfriend is physically abusive to her, as well as to Juan and his siblings. Consuela's extended family has been concerned about Juan's situation and expressed this concern to all who would listen, including social service workers, school officials, housing authority officials where the family lives, members of their Catholic parish, the local Virginia Garcia Health Clinic, and a local shelter for runaway teens. Despite the family's best efforts,

Consuela says Juan will no longer submit to parental authority without the threat of physical punishment from her boyfriend.

While English is Juan's second language, he has always done well in school. But at the age of 13, Juan's grades began to decline and he started developing gang associations. He acknowledges being a member of the "Barrio Riders" and displays numerous gang tattoos. On several occasions, Juan has not returned home in the evening and has been reported to the police as a runaway. Each time, the police have found Juan and taken him to a shelter operated by a local church, where he has remained temporarily until he is returned to the custody of his mother.

Juan was diagnosed in 1998 as diabetic and has been treated at the Virginia Garcia Clinic, a local nonprofit, and twice at the emergency room of two local hospitals. Since Juan and his family do not have health care insurance, systematic treatment of Juan's condition has been problematic, especially since it has been unclear what Juan's status is under the state-sponsored health plan.

On April 20, 1999, Juan encountered a boy at school (Javier) who was affiliated with a rival gang and had been seen with Juan's girlfriend. Juan confronted Javier in the school bathroom. A fight ensued, but no weapons were used. Subsequent reports indicate that Juan threw Javier against the wall, then punched and kicked him. Juan then fled the scene, stealing Javier's backpack and pager. Javier suffered abrasions and a badly swollen face. Juan was arrested soon thereafter at a shopping mall. He was taken to the local police station, booked, and given a cursory physical examination in response to complaints of dizziness. At the time, he told officials of his diabetic condition and that he had run out of insulin.

Juan was charged with several counts, including Robbery III (class C felony), Assault IV (class A misdemeanor), Possession of a Controlled Substance II (class C felony) and Carrying a

Concealed Weapon (CCW, class B misdemeanor). The drug and CCW charges resulted from the police finding a small amount of marijuana and a 7-inch hunting knife in Juan's backpack.

During the arrest, Juan was hostile and uncooperative with the police, and he made threats to "kick Javier's ass" if the boy cooperated with the prosecution. By the time Juan reached the detention facility, he had calmed down and indicated to the police that he wanted to go home. Juan has had limited prior juvenile court contact; he has never been on probation, he has no delinquency court appearances, and he has not had any prior expulsions from school. At the time of this incident, he had a Theft II (shoplift) and Assault IV pending (both class A misdemeanors), and was in warrant status for being unable to locate. The warrant indicated that the judicial officer did not oppose release. This is Juan's first warrant, and he and Consuela both advise that they had recently moved and had no idea that the warrant had been issued. But Juan is facing expulsion from school over this incident.

How can the family, the school, the juvenile justice system, nonprofit social service agencies, churches, and local public officials work together to do what is right for individuals like Juan Gomez? What can be done to prevent further escalation of an already bad situation? More importantly for our purposes, whose responsibility is it to glue together the pieces of the fragmented systems described above into a more integrated and community-centered social service system? For the administrators of Cascadia County, the answer was clear: "As administrators we have leadership responsibility for addressing the needs of Juan Gomez, and the growing number of individuals like Juan." But how can officials take the initiative to do what is right for Juan Gomez when they reside in one of the richest counties in the state, where residents are more concerned about their roads and taxes than they are about the rising social service needs of the community?

Creation of the Vision Action Network

For about 15 years, the Cascadia County administrator and his senior deputy had been thinking about how best way to harness the array of social services within the county to better meet the needs of residents. As students in an executive MPA program, they had written their master's degree capstone paper on how this might be done. Their thinking was inspired by an article of Charles Levine's that emphasized the important and growing role of career administrators in generating civic capacity through processes of co-production, and processes that link the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to increase impact beyond what is possible with any one service provider (Levine 1984). But how could they give this kind of idea some legs?

The administrative leaders of the county began in small ways by encouraging collaboration among nonprofit social service providers within the county, and rewarding them through the budget process when this cooperation and collaboration occurred. They took every opportunity they could to brief elected officials on the changing demographic composition of the county and the potential implications for the delivery of services. But these small steps were not doing much to capture the imagination of the community and its elected officials. Most citizens were mainly concerned about protecting their lifestyle from the adverse impacts of economic development; they were quite oblivious to the needs of those less fortunate and especially to the large increase in the Hispanic population.

The administrative leaders saw a window of opportunity in two triggering forces within the county that might be used to focus greater attention on the growing gap between county resources and community needs. One was the rapid population growth that brought increased demands for levels of service such as police, fire, roads, education, and housing. The second was

the growing disparity between the needs of low-income citizens and the county resources that were capped by a series of property tax limitations. These developments persuaded elected officials to convene a county-wide collaboration process, subsequently called the VisionWest Planning Process.

Once this process was put into place, the administrators employed two strategies to generate interest and community ownership of the process. First, they gathered lots of data and placed it on the VisionWest Planning Web site. Second, they instigated an “envisioning process” with the community to generate issues of importance to the citizens, along with any suggested solutions they had for ameliorating the problems.

From 1970–1995, the population of Cascadia County more than doubled, creating huge pressure on roads, sewers, and other infrastructure services. The growth was expected to continue. The percentage of people over 55 was projected to grow from approximately 16 percent in 1990 to 26 percent of the total in 2020. During the same period, the percentage of younger adults (ages 20–54) was expected to decrease from 54 percent to 46 percent of the total population. The relative percentage of Hispanic residents increased significantly during the last decade, from 4.6 percent to 11.2 percent of total population in 2000. One in 15 county residents (and nearly one in 10 children) lived below the poverty line.

This data challenged the accepted stereotype of the county. As the home of the state’s high-tech industry, the citizens of the county had enjoyed the benefits of good jobs and high levels of service. The community was viewed as relatively homogeneous, middle class, and professional. But other, less visible issues threatened the quality of life: mental illness, homelessness, hunger, lack of living alternatives for seniors and the disabled, and access to affordable health care. The relative affluence of the county obscured the fact that so many

residents (one in 15) lived below the poverty line. The envisioning process provided an opportunity to confront the citizens with this demographic information and its social service implications for the community.

Once the elected officials had given their approval to proceed with the community VisionWest envisioning process, the county administrative staff contacted key opinion leaders within the community to obtain their support and participation in a community-wide dialogue. An initial round of discussions was undertaken to identify the key issues of concern to citizens. The following were identified and served as the template for the rest of the community-envisioning process: aging and disabilities; basic needs; behavioral health; children and families; education; the environment; housing; and primary health care.

These issues had two things in common: they reflected the growing income disparity within the community, and they affirmed the inability of any single institution to handle these emerging issues on its own. Most community envisioning processes end with the identification of the central issues of concern to the citizens. But since the purpose of the VisionWest process was to create community-wide ownership, and to identify resources that could be leveraged from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, the county staff emphasized the importance of following up with problem-solving teams organized around each set of issues. These teams held meetings to develop an in-depth survey of the more difficult challenges and most promising opportunities in their respective areas of responsibility. Each team was charged with producing an issue paper that included the following: (1) an overview of the trends and conditions pertaining to that issue, (2) specific issues and strategies identified by the Issue Team, and (3) a short list of key recommendations that participants felt were significant and could be implemented in the next couple of years. The issue papers were made electronically accessible

on the VisionWest Planning website. The goal was to have the issue papers serve as a starting point for increasing awareness of these issues, and to use the papers to inform a variety of public, private, and nonprofit plans and initiatives.

A final step in the process involved the faith community. The Cascadia staff knew early on that it was important to involve the religious community in crafting a county-wide approach in dealing with the emerging complexity of social needs. The churches provide an untold amount of formal and informal social service to the citizens of the county. They have the loyalty and confidence of the citizens, and they provide connective linkages to the citizenry that are not available through other county, business, or nonprofit service providers.

How was this support and network of trust among religious organizations to be enlisted in the service of the larger needs of the county? The county staff decided to use the same model they had followed in their other outreach efforts: contact the key opinion leaders of the faith community who are most likely to be supportive of the county efforts; build relationships of personal trust; and then call a more formal meeting to set forth the agenda and ask for the participation of faith-based organizations. This model produced surprising results. Not only did the faith community respond with great enthusiasm, its members expressed both surprise and gratitude that county officials would expend the effort to do what they had never done on their own. For the first time in the history of Cascadia County, the church leaders began meeting to discuss how they could contribute to the community-building efforts undertaken by the county leaders. What kind of social services were they each providing? Which groups were falling through the cracks? How might they pool and coordinate their efforts? These were the kinds of questions generated in the meetings.

The experience of working together for the first time was so productive and exhilarating that a core group of faith leaders decided to form the Inter-Religious Network, which would operate under the umbrella of the larger Vision Action Network. This new organization is a collection of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith traditions, brought together to achieve the following goals:

- Provide a forum for ongoing relationship building, information sharing, inter-religious dialogue, and community problem solving
- Develop sustainable relationships with other community leaders and participate in efforts to identify, discuss, and mobilize around concerns of mutual interest
- Provide a network of faith leaders that can be accessed easily and efficiently
- Create settings where new and innovative expressions of community leadership by faith-based organizations or individuals may be freely offered
- Provide opportunities for group information-sharing programs and other activities

The creation of the Inter-Religious Network represented the final link in a long chain of events that led to the creation of an entirely new organization to implement and sustain the work of the VisionWest process.

Transforming Visions into Reality: Administrative Implementation

Significant changes cannot occur without the efforts and enthusiasm of individual people.

However, if the changes are to be truly effective and long-lasting, they must be owned by organizations and institutions. A major goal of the VisionWest planning process was to create an environment that would sustain change through new policies and new institutional arrangements. Early on, county administrators recognized the need for a vehicle distinct from a governmental

body to carry on the work of the VisionWest planning process—a forum for the community to talk across jurisdictions, across sectors, and across issues, and to discuss, strategize, and mobilize around community priorities. A resonating theme from most of the nearly 2,000 county residents and institutions that participated in VisionWest was that collaborative planning and mobilization should not be a one-time event. Instead, it should be part of a new way of doing business in Cascadia County. In March 2001, a free-standing nonprofit organization called the Vision Action Network was incorporated as an institutional focus of the energy and commitment generated by the VisionWest planning process.

Those behind the incorporation effort expected that the network would become the forum for multiple institutions and organizations to contemplate future trends and opportunities, and to build on existing relationships and collaboration. The Vision Action Network serves simultaneously as a gathering place, network, support group, incubator, information sharer, community organizer, and broker. The network's board of directors represents all sectors of the community: small and large businesses, K-12 and higher education, local governments, social service not-for-profits, religious institutions, and health care organizations. Funding for the organization comes from partners in each of the sectors. The network hired its first executive director in spring 2002. The Vision Action Network established a small number of community councils to engage the recommendations of the issue papers and to work on implementation of the most promising strategies.

EXERCISING ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE SERVICE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The creation of the Vision Action Network touches on a variety of themes central to this book. We begin with the question of the proper role of administrative leadership in the community. How can this role be successfully carried out in partnership with elected officials and the citizens of the community? How can the instrumental role of administrators be reconciled with the constitutive role they perform?

The Vision Action Network came into existence because the administrators believed that public servants have an obligation to be more than passive and instrumental caretakers of policy choices made by elected officials. They took the initiative in creating an agenda to meet the needs of the growing number of weak and powerless members of the community. They did not draw a bright-line distinction between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. In reaching out across boundaries to create a new third-party institution, they took risks. First, there was a complex array of stakeholders operating under separate and independent sources of authority; these stakeholders measured their success by different criteria. Second, participants in the process were asked to create a vision for the future based on data that did not correspond to their current experience. It was hard for many to believe that beneath the patina of economic prosperity lay a large and growing core of residents who were poor and in need of a wide variety of social services not currently available. Third, there was the need to create support for the agenda with elected officials and to sustain this support over several election cycles.

After successfully undertaking the risk of launching and managing a civic engagement process that cut across sectoral boundaries and produced a shared vision for the future, the administrators subjected themselves to potential criticism on a variety of fronts. For example, if

the Vision Action Network became the functional equivalent of a single supplier—a Wal-Mart for the provision of social services to the community—then the jurisdiction would have given up its authority for balancing the competing needs for efficiency, effectiveness, equity, responsiveness, and due process considerations. The administrative champions of the VisionWest planning process spent endless hours pondering how to avoid the worst-case scenario, where a new entity is created that becomes the 800-pound gorilla in the room, has little accountability, and places demands on the political system that result in the breakdown of a working political consensus in the community. To avoid this, the administrators took several precautionary steps to preserve their role as a Democratic Balancewheel:

- They preserved the jurisdiction’s authority over the social service agenda and the county budget to support it.
- They resisted using the creation of the Vision Action Network as an excuse to reduce the county’s share of funding, and they succeeded in getting this principle memorialized into the county’s agreement by elected officials to support the future operations of the Vision Action Network.
- They worked hard to establish the financial independence of the Vision Action Network and set a certain time when the county would no longer provide financial support.
- They made certain that social service groups with special needs could continue to seek funding through the county and would not be tied to any kind of monopolistic role of the Vision Action Network.

The leadership role played by administrators in the Vision Action Network illustrates the Balancewheel role of administrative responsibility. Over a 15-year period, administrative leaders used all of the roles identified with the administrative traditions that have become deeply

embedded in the history and practice of public administration. For example, at an instrumental level, the Vision Action Network illustrates the critical importance of the role of administrators in providing the technical competence necessary for participants to obtain trustworthy and reliable information, manage the processes of engagement efficiently and effectively, and produce promised results on time and within budget. But this alone was insufficient. The entire process rested on a foundation of engagement that built trust with critical opinion leaders and stakeholders. To prevent this generation of support from becoming a simple process of coalition-building among elites, administrative leaders expanded the process to obtain ownership by the community at large. In addition to relying on rational planning and civic engagement, administrative leaders were extremely entrepreneurial in the way they went about defining the problem and seeking solutions. They were energetic, creative, and innovative—in short, all of the things we associate with “running government like a business.” Finally, they were mindful of their interest-balancing role in bringing interests to the table that would not otherwise have been represented without proactive engagement from county leaders. To accomplish this, administrators reached out to organize and involve stakeholders that were previously not an active part of the political process. In short, the creation of the Vision Action Network required administrators to draw on the legacy of our administrative traditions: balancing competing interests, cultivating civic governance, taking entrepreneurial leadership, maintaining accountability for efficient and effective results, and being responsive to the dominant interests in the community without sacrificing the needs and access of those who have no voice.

Public service leadership requires leaders to size up the constellation of contending forces at play in the community and to assess the range of plausible approaches for engaging citizens and officials in developing institutional responses. This process entails considerable art as well as

science. Tacit knowledge and astute judgment of stakeholders, circumstances, and organizational capacity must be linked to systematic analysis. It requires thinking strategically about creating a commonly shared vision; reaching out across public, private, and nonprofit sector boundaries to build support for that vision; and transforming it into institutional forms that can endure after the individual agents of change have left the scene. In the United States, such efforts must be conducted in ways that maintain democratic accountability, preserve the role responsibilities of elected officials, and ensure some measure of responsiveness to citizens of the community. Career public servants work at the center of these efforts and serve as democratic stewards in balancing the tensions among our traditions of governance.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the major drivers of change that will most likely affect the future of your organization/department/jurisdiction?
2. Choose the most important driver of change and develop the most likely scenarios that you imagine will emerge.
3. The development of a process for collecting and using objective data for decision making played a central role in the successful creation of the Vision Action Network. To what extent was this useful? Essential? How can objective data and analysis be best used as a leadership tool to foster consensus and collaboration?
4. What are the lessons that emerge from the Vision Action Network case in terms of creating a commonly shared vision? What do you know about the processes that enable problems to be successfully transformed into issues, and issues transformed into public

policy changes? To what extent does the transformational process in this case differ from your own experience? To what extent can the process in this case be replicated?

5. With term limits and part-time local elected officials, career administrators are playing an increasingly important role in initiating public policy changes. This policy development role stands alongside the traditional roles of career administrators in being good stewards of policy implementation. What leadership lessons emerge from this case about how the role relationship between career public administrators and elected politicians can be successfully managed to achieve lasting change?

NOTES

1. The Office of Management and Budget established the official measure of poverty used by the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the Census Bureau definition, a family is “in poverty” if the total family income is less than the threshold appropriate for that family. For example, if a family has five members—two children, a mother and father, and a great-aunt—their poverty threshold in 2002 was set at \$22,007. If the mother’s income was \$10,000 for that year, the father’s \$5,000, and the great-aunt’s \$10,000, the total income of \$25,000 would mean the family was not “in poverty” according to the official definition. However, government social service programs do not have to use the official poverty measure as eligibility criteria. Low income is defined as being at or below 200 percent of the poverty level.