Bureaucratic Posture:

Building a Composite Theory of Bureaucratic Behavior

This paper explores the underlying assumptions and main findings for three different streams of research about bureaucratic behavior (representative bureaucracy, public service motivation, and public choice). It considers the linkage these streams suggest between bureaucratic postures and the advancement of the public interest and bureaucratic performance. A main conclusion is that although limited in scope of application, each of the different streams has merit. The author suggests that existing research is too narrow and the field needs to consider a more complex model of bureaucratic behavior that draws from these three fields to offer a model that might be more widely applicable to the range of motives for work found among the members of the public bureaucracy. Some attributes that might be characteristic of such a model are sketched out.

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I. The Study of the Bureaucracy

Although there are several different streams of research examining bureaucratic postures, our overall understanding of the underlying motivational needs of public employees and the linkage between these needs and bureaucratic outcomes is quite limited. In fact, in his recent Gaus Lecture, Johan P. Olsen (2003) pointed directly to the study of the bureaucracy as an area of research needing more scholarly research and models reflecting the complexity of human behavior. Others have specifically pointed to the need for more research on the motivational factors that influence behavior in the public sector workforce (Behn, 1995; Perry and Porter 1982; Perry and Wise 1990; Wright 2001).

The study of the bureaucracy gains importance because of the potential impact public employees have on the pursuit and attainment of the public interest and the performance of the bureaucracy as an institution. Despite the relatively large volume of work on issues related to the composition of the public workforce, the pool of knowledge is relatively shallow about the linkage between workforce motivation and important outcomes like achieving high performance or advancing the public interest. Overall, the level of methodological sophistication can be described as modest and the models employed often lack rigor. For example, key constructs are vague, abbreviated, and measured by questionable proxies; common definitions of constructs are lacking or misunderstood; contextual factors are often unspecified; studies assume generic effects from one level of bureaucracy to another as well as from one occupational group to another; and there is little replication of research findings. There is an over-reliance on secondary aggregated data sources and lack of attention to other ways of knowing about bureaucratic behavior (see Lynn 1991 and Blais & Dion 1991). As scholars in this field, we are often uninterested in related research models and findings outside our borders. This inclination is not only reflected in a low level of reference to other relevant disciplines like psychology (Wright 2001) or sociology, for example, but also in the lack of cross-fertilization among streams of research popular within the field of public affairs.

The purpose of this paper is to examine different streams of research on bureaucratic postures and identify underlying assumptions upon which different approaches to the study of the bureaucracy rest, and to study how they inform our understanding of the linkage between the composition of the bureaucracy and key bureaucratic outcomes like the advancement of the public interest and efficient or effective performance. A main conclusion is that although limited in
scope of application, each of three different streams considered here is supported by empirical research and contributes to our understanding of the motives public servants have and the different roles or postures bureaucrats may take. The paper proposes a composite approach to the study of bureaucratic behavior that embraces motives found in three streams of research which may be more widely applicable to the full range of behaviors and psychological motivations found among the members of the public bureaucracy. Some attributes that might be characteristic of such a model are sketched out. Such a model would also have the potential to advance our understanding of the linkages among bureaucratic postures, the public interest, and organizational performance.

Pursuit of the Public Interest and High Performance

Aucoin (1996: 26-28) marries the concepts of performance and public interest when he asserts that there is a tenable public interest in having an accountable and effective public service. Similarly, Pfiffner (1999: 541) holds that in the era of the “hollow state” the new challenge of public management is figuring out how to nurture a dedication to the public interest and a commitment to mission accomplishment. As an institution, the bureaucracy plays a key role in the pursuit of the public interest and the membership of the bureaucracy affects its ability to recognize and respond to the special interests and policy preferences of different socio-economic groups (Mosher, 1968). Pfiffner (1999) asserts that citizens expect those who do the government’s work to demonstrate a deep commitment to the public interest. Carnevale (1995: 38) ties job performance to moral involvement, innovative behavior, spontaneity, and pro-social behavior.

As others have noted, the public interest is not an easy concept to define (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999; Murray 1987); the linkage between bureaucratic actions and the advancement of the public interest is equally elusive. If the public interest is comprised of a mixture of special and private interests, at times at odds with the peculiar interests and preferences of a given group or individual, and something that evolves and changes over time, as Lippmann (1955) suggests, then knowing which actions or policies are in the interest of the public would challenge even the most dedicated public servant. The public interest is more than the sum of prevalent interests. It is a synergistic outcome that is derived from collective interests of a given population. The public interest is not static; it embraces the needs and desires of future generations (March and Olsen, 1989).

Organizational performance is also a construct that defies easy definitions and many different models frame out the relationship between different factors and organizational effectiveness. An agency can be judged effective if it discharges its administrative and operational functions pursuant to its mission and pursues the mission for which it was enabled and conceived of by its stakeholders (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999). The parallel concern of organizational efficiency is also important in the context of the current discussion.
and in this regard both cost efficiency and the avoidance of waste and fraud are relevant.

The institutional capacity of the bureaucracy in itself is a matter of public interest. In administrative states, the bureaucracy functions as a linkage between political bodies and the people. As administrative complexity deepens, civil servants gain more responsibility for interpreting and applying public policies and their potential impact on the quality of citizens’ lives increases (Anton, 1980; Dogan, 1975; Long, 1949).

**Bureaucratic Postures**

Pitkin (1967) identified different bureaucratic postures including the relatively common forms of trustees, delegates and politicos that are useful for understanding how the role of the bureaucrat is envisioned in different streams of research. A delegate is someone who tries to act as his or her constituents would. Such a person would serve as an advocate of the value preferences and policy choices of people who share her or his social origins and group affiliations. This posture of advocacy, however, is in conflict with traditional notions of the way the administrative state should function and the so-called norm of administrative neutrality. A trustee is someone who uses his or her judgment to act in the best interest of individuals and groups. Such a person would take into account other factors than the stated values and preferences of reference groups. A politico is someone who acts to maximize a political position or status. Politico may use their position in the bureaucracy to advance a particular political ideology or point of view.

At about the same time as Pitkin’s typology was introduced, Vroom observed that individual differences in motives account for variations among individuals in their choices of work roles (1964) and may account for differences in “…peoples’ affective responses to the work role which they have chosen” (1970). Moreover, Vroom concluded that an individual’s attitudes toward his or her work role are a function of both personality and situational factors. A number of researchers have studied the different factors and processes that influence the roles public servants choose to take. These forces appear to have both the potential to increase and decrease the likelihood that an individual bureaucrat will assume a role posture that is representative of his or her social origins serving as a “trustee” in their interest. Selden et al (1998) summarize this work and describe the factors that appear to influence whether or not a bureaucrat decides to take on the role of minority representative or trustee.

Similarly, “situational factors play a role in explaining when public service motives surface and dominate individual behavior and when behavior occurs as a consequence of other motives. Public service motives may be dominant, for example, when an individual embarks on a career or makes similar life choices. Public service motives may dominate in certain situational contexts on the job that trigger deeply held values and beliefs and call for acts of moral heroism. … Public service motives may anchor individual discretion and judgment and decisions to depart from established practice” (Wise 2000).
In attempting to heed Olsen’s admonition that public administration needs models reflecting the complexity of human behavior, we need to go a bit further than traditional approaches based on typologies of bureaucratic behavior. Two considerations appear critical to building a more complex theory of bureaucratic behavior. These understandings are sometimes implicit in existing research but need to become explicit in research designs aimed at understanding bureaucratic behavior.¹

First, in trying to understand the determinants of behavior within a given agency, we need to study the extent to which multiple postures are characteristic of its public servants. If we look only for evidence to support the existence of public service motives, for example, we cannot obtain a picture of the complexity of human behavior in a given organization. We need information about how at a given point in time different bureaucratic postures are distributed within organizations and the proportion of individuals who can be characterized as representing one role or another role in different organizational contexts and under different management styles. It may well be that certain agencies are dominated by a particular bureaucratic posture, but we need more evidence about the circumstances under which this is so and the likelihood that an agency will conform to this pattern. Alternatively, we may learn that there is some typical distribution of dominant bureaucratic postures in public organizations but we gain no insight into the question of how motives for work are distributed in the public workforce from studies focusing only on one role or posture.

Second, in acknowledging that some bureaucrats are predisposed to a particular bureaucratic posture and that their behavior can be characterized as consistent with a particular role, we need to acknowledge explicitly the probability that other public servants display inconsistent behavior. The same bureaucrat, who assumes the role of trustee on one issue important to his or her social group, may also take a very different bureaucratic posture in addressing other policy issues. We know professionals have multiple ongoing tasks. The same bureaucrat may act in a self-interested way on other questions. She may favor expenditures for schools in neighborhoods where her own children are enrolled, knowing that other schools are more needy. Or he may take an altruistic posture on another item based on a love of humankind. A bureaucrat’s role may be in a constant state of improvisation. "Tensions between self-serving interests and interests that serve the public good may occur in the daily performance of a bureaucrat’s work They may develop into a habitual behavior in which public servants increasingly lean toward one end of the continuum [or the other]" (Wise 2000). We must acknowledge in research designs that for some bureaucrats, the pressure from competing obligations and allegiances plays out differently from case to case.

Certainly we have gained understanding about bureaucratic behavior and its consequences for bureaucratic outcomes from existing research. The point of departure here is that current approaches are too narrow and reveal a need for a composite approach to the study of the composition of the bureaucracy and its

¹ My focus is on government organizations but this is not meant to imply that I do not think that individuals with the motives discussed here are not found in other sectors.
impact on the public interest and bureaucratic performance. To gain a more complete understanding of the complexity of human behavior in bureaucratic organizations, we need to acknowledge explicitly the complexity of human behavior in empirical studies and attempt to capture evidence of the range of behaviors and competing postures within public organizations.

Underlying Assumptions about Motives for Work:
1. Some individuals are predisposed to a particular set of motives.
2. Variations in the strength of different motives for work are related to work role choices, sector of employment, and bureaucratic postures.
3. Situational factors affect the strength of different motives for work.
4. Individuals are complex and may display multiple and competing motives for work.
5. Public organizations are made up of people with different dominant motives and bureaucratic postures as well as of individuals with mixed and competing motives.

The remainder of this section will describe the three main bodies of work examining the composition of the public bureaucracy. The next section will identify and analyze the underlying assumptions and values within each of these bodies of research. The third part suggests a composite approach to the study of the composition of the bureaucracy. The last part considers the consequences of a continued lack of cross-fertilization in these streams of research and the potential benefits of a more integrated approach.

Three Streams of Research on the Composition of the Public Bureaucracy

Studies examining the composition of the public bureaucracy and its consequences can be organized into at least three major streams. Interestingly, with the exception of representative bureaucracy and public service motivation, there is relatively little cross fertilization across these fields. This means that the knowledge acquired by scholars working in one area is generally not part of the framework or understanding of those working in another. In many cases these fields of work share common research assumptions and worldviews, while in others they are at odds with one another. Recognizing differences in assumptions, perspectives, and understanding might contribute to the advancement of the study of the bureaucracy and the consequences of membership for both democratic and performance-based objectives.

This section briefly reviews the three streams of research that examine the composition of the bureaucracy and its consequences. The streams of research are presented from oldest to newest and include representative bureaucracy, public choice, and public service motivation. The discussion tries to apply different substantive forms of representation to each stream, using Pitikin’s typology. Using this approach, it is assumed that individual bureaucrats behave differently and assume different postures. The point of departure is to assume
that each stream has merit in accounting for how the behavior of some public employees impacts the pursuit of the public interest or organizational performance.

**Representative Bureaucracy Stream.** The largest stream of research studying the composition of the bureaucracy would fall into the category generally referred to as representative bureaucracy. Representative bureaucracy includes both studies of passive or descriptive representation and active representation. Passive or descriptive representation may be relevant to the current discussion in that efforts to advance passive representation through special recruitment, advancement or retention programs may be at odds with other criteria for human resource decisions, such as merit or performance-based standards and could in turn have an impact on bureaucratic performance or an agency’s capacity to recognize and advance the public interest. Active or substantive representation pertains to the extent to which congruence in attitudes and policy preferences exist between bureaucrats and the public and the extent to which public servants draw on their roots as members of social groups in making decisions or taking actions. To the extent that the public interest is advanced by actions and attitudes that increase the range of ideas, values and preferences to the table, a representative bureaucracy is more likely to balance special interests and advance the common public good (Lindblom 1959).

Evidence linking a more representative bureaucracy with organizational efficiency or effectiveness is generally lacking although Meier’s et al. (1999) provide one study showing that a more representative public workforce produces positive performance outcomes for both majority and minority client groups. Many scholars in this field are occupied by efforts to determine the extent to which individual characteristics are related to variations among bureaucrats in attitudes, values, or policy preferences (Hindera, 1990; Dolan 2000; 2002; Keiser et al. 2000; Selden, 1997). Some test the level of congruence between bureaucrats and the groups they represent (Hindera, 1993; Hyden, 1995; Meier, 1991; Meier et al., 1989; Meier and Stewart, 1992; Selden 1997; Selden et al., 1998; Dolan, 2000; 2002; Kelly, 1993; 1998; Meier, Stewart, and England, 1989; and Mladenka, 1989; Saltzstein, 1989). These studies offer some insight into understanding how the public interest is advanced or hindered by the attitudes and behavior of bureaucrats and the connection between membership composition and bureaucratic performance.

Applying Pitkin’s typology to the representative bureaucracy literature, bureaucrats appear to most frequently be treated as trustees. Rosenbloom (1974) asserts that bureaucrats most commonly act as trustees who use their discretion to make decisions on behalf of, and in the best interests of the represented.

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*2 Scholars distinguish between passive and active representation. In the case of passive representation, responsiveness is achieved by the extent to which the bureaucracy is similar to the populace on key demographic attributes, such as ethnicity or sex. For active representation, responsiveness is achieved when the actions taken and policy preferences expressed by bureaucrats are congruent with the preferences of people they are demographically like in the populace.*
**Public Choice Stream.** A second body of work falls under the category labeled Public Choice Theory. This work is derived from the thinking of Buchanan and Tullock, and is grounded in rational theory. Its origins date to the 1950s but many of the ideas were refined during the 1970s. Niskanen’s (1971) contribution to this school was to specifically link bureaucrat behavior to maximization of resources and budgets. Public Choice presents an alternative to the notion that bureaucrats act as trustees of the public interest or as delegates on behalf of the groups from which they come. Using Pitkin’s terminology, these bureaucrats could be labeled *politicos* because they act to maximize a political position or status. The underlying premise of this school of thought is that self-interest and personal gain motivate government workers. Thus this work has direct relevance to the dual concerns of public interest and bureaucratic performance.

According to public choice theory, bureaucrats seek to maximize their self-interest through actions that increase the size of the public bureaucracy, or expand its budget (Breton, 1974; Buchanan and Tullock, 1962; 1977; Downs, 1967; Niskanen, 1971; 1991). As Breton (1974: 162) explains: “…it is through the maximization of this objective that bureaucrats are able to achieve the highest possible income and prestige consistent with the constraints to which they are subjected.” Lane (1995: 69) identifies a broader definition prevalent in the literature: “…public officials maximize their own interests whatever they may be and … bureau size is conducive to maximization.”

The assumption that bureaucrats act as politicos on the basis of having calculated the potential gains and losses of different public policies and programs in terms of their own self-interests (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1971; Staaaf, 1977), leads to the expectation that public employees will try to maximize the payoffs they receive from public actions. These payoffs may be in the form of more benefits or less difficult work. Concerns about self-interested behavior among bureaucrats are magnified by evidence showing that public employees are more politically active than other citizens which gives the opportunity for their preferences to have greater impact in the political arena (Lipset, 1960).

Writers in this field generally adhere to Downs’ (1967: 2) view of human nature and apply the assumption of rational behavior broadly to the bureaucracy: “…every official is significantly motivated by his (sic)… own self-interest even when acting in a purely official capacity.”

The body of work is not widely cited in literature derived from other streams of research on the composition of the bureaucracy. Mitchell (1999) examines why until recently political scientists and others ignored the approach known as public choice and notes that school of thought faced a hostile reception. Many writers challenge the idea that public employees can be presumed to be self-interested (Aucoin, 1991; Dilulio 1994; Lane 1995; March and Simon 1989; Seligman, 1986; Wade, 1979). A counter argument is that public employees’ motives are more complex and factors other than self-interest determine their behavior (Hill, 1991; Kelman, 1987; Lane, 1995). Nevertheless, empirical research indicates the argument has merit under some conditions and for some public employees. Blais and Dion (1991) conclude from their review that
evidence supports Niskanen’s more narrow idea that bureaucrats seek to “boost” their budgets, but does not support the assumption that bureaucrats themselves actually benefit from that behavior. Contextual and institutional factors may account for rational behavior among some civil servants in some national governments (Lynn 1991; Peters, 1991). Similarly, some report that significant differences in self-interested behavior exist among public employees depending on the level of government in which they are employed and their status within the bureaucracy (Dunleavy, 1991; Wise and Szücs, 1996).

Some work provides evidence that some bureaucrats do act as politicos and successfully promote their ideological values. For example, Anton (1980) reported that Swedish bureaucrats successfully advanced their social agendas during the 1970s and Schwartz (1994) reports that bureaucrats in four countries promoted a special brand of fiscal conservatism that transformed public administration during the 1980s. Wise and Szücs (1996) found some evidence for and against self-interested behavior reflected in spending priorities and preferences for reductions in the size of the bureaucracy. In terms of actions, some find that self-interested behavior is limited in situations where bureaucrats act in their capacity as public officials (Blais and Dion, 1991; Egeberg, 1995a), and thus poses less risk to bias and the public interest.

If, as public choice scholars suggest, bureaucrats mainly try to limit their responsibility and risk in discretionary situations, the quality of government outputs for target citizens is likely reduced and an organization’s ability to achieve its primary mission may be undermined (Lipsky 1976:201-2917; Jones 1977; 301; Blau 1955: 50).

**Public Service Motivation Stream.** Studies on public service motivation (PSM) form a third category. This is a relatively recent body of research stemming from Rainey’s (1976; 1986) work distinguishing between public and private sector incentive structures and identifying a public service ethic and Perry and Wise’s (1990) efforts to develop the construct of public service motivation. But it is grounded in older writings from various disciplines (Downs 1967; Homans 1961; Karl 1979; Buchanan 1975; Knoke and Wright-Isak 1982). The PSM construct, which pertains to affective, normative, and rational human needs, is difficult to capture empirically particularly with one-time aggregate data compiled for other purposes.3 As noted elsewhere, this is a stream of research that has not benefited from systematic investigation (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999) and one lacking common definitions of core concepts (Brewer and Selden 1995; Wise 2000). Public sector incentives are mistakenly confused with public service motives—job security, for example, would not fulfill a public service need. Public service motives do not include all acts of benevolence and are not simply

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3 A basic premise of motivation theory is that individuals respond to the existing reward structure. Another is that unfulfilled needs are stronger than those that have been gratified. A third is that the valence of rewards varies over time. Single observations of attitudes about work in aggregated data sets are unlikely to allow researchers to take these factors into consideration.
about performing a job that is important to society or helping others, although we might find that PSM is statistically associated with these proxies.

*Public service motivation*, as it is used here, pertains to the process that causes individuals to perform acts that contribute to the public good as a way of satisfying their personal needs. PSM is about the motives people have for behavior, not the incentives organizations offer for performance or commitment. People with public service motives also have other motives including those pertaining to the basic human needs (Wise 2000). Public service motives, like other motives, will be weaker and stronger at different times both in response to changes in individual need structures and historical/contextual factors (Rainey 1982; Wise 2000). For example, public service needs were stronger after 9/11 than immediately before it. Public service motives will be found in different degrees of importance or strength in different organizations (Rainey; 1982) and may be found in any sector of employment (Wise 2000), but public service motives are assumed to be more likely found among those seeking public sector employment (Perry and Wise 1990; Wise 2000).

Perry and Wise (1990) postulated that *In public organizations, PSM is positively related to individual performance*. Research exploring the implications of public service motivation for bureaucratic performance or the public interest is still limited. Naff and Crum (1999) report a strong positive relation between their measure of PSM and individual performance ratings. Alonso and Lewis (2001) report a data set using a PSM index composed of five items supports the link between performance and PSM, while another survey of federal employees distinguishing between those who prioritize ‘service to others’ over other values does not. Brewer and Selden employ more of a critical incident approach to performance and find that in incidents involving fraud and abuse, those with high PSM are more likely than others to blow the whistle.

Public service motives have the potential to advance the public interest in several ways (Wise 2000). First, they may provide a basis for activities that educate and empower the citizens as members of a democratic state. Second, they can fortify public servants to overcome self-serving interests, moral inertia, and risk avoidance. The strength of public service motives may give individuals the courage to resist organizational norms and peer pressure that are in conflict with the way they interpret the public good. Third, they anchor acts of judgment and discretion in a concern for the common good (Wise 2000). Scholars report evidence associating public *sector* employment with greater concern for social conditions and advancing the public interest (Edwards et al 1981; Houston 2000; Rainey 1982; Witmer 1991) but evidence linking public *service* motivation and public interest is lacking.

The call for moral involvement and greater engagement on the part of bureaucrats (Carnevale 1995: 38; Gawthrop 1998; Wise 2000) directly pertains to bureaucratic performance in that it involves doing more than meeting minimum job performance standards or even meeting satisfactory standards. Public service motivation is linked empirically to higher organizational commitment and

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4 They also use grade level as a proxy for individual performance.
lower turnover, factors that would be expected to indirectly improve organizational performance (Crewson 1997).

Several scholars have linked public service motivation to organizational productivity empirically (Rainey 1982; Rainey and Steinbauer 1999; Crewson 1995; Brewer and Selden 1998; Alonso and Lewis 2001; Naff and Crum 1999). The findings are sometimes difficult to interpret because the researchers use a proxy for individual performance or report opinions about performance, but several authors conclude that a positive relationship exists between performance and public service motivation. Brewer and Selden (1998), for example, find that individuals who measure high on public service motives are more likely to report instances of fraud and abuse, which could contribute to greater efficiency in government operations. Naff and Crum (1999) report that an individuals’ score on public service motivation is positively and significantly associated with a survey item about work group performance.

In an important contribution to both theory and empirical research on the linkage between public service motivation and performance, Rainey and Steinbauer (1999) distinguish among three forms of motivation that enable an organization to make progress toward achieving its goals and objectives, particularly when they are integrated into a broad approach to motivation. They contend that effective government agencies have high levels of public service motivation and that effective leadership practices engage individuals’ motives for public service and link them to agency mission and task performance.

II. Underlying Values in Three Streams of Research

The three streams of research on the composition of the bureaucracy have different underlying values and points of departure. Eight key features are considered which provide insight into the research perspective of scholars in the different streams of research. These are the intellectual origins or academic roots of the stream of research, the substantive form of representation it is best associated with; the scope of the workforce to which it pertains; the worldview of researchers writing in this stream; the apparent view of human nature reflected in this stream; the assumed posture bureaucrats take; and the anticipated impact on the public interest and organizational performance. Figure 1 summarizes the eight key features that are discussed in this section.

**Intellectual Origins.** The three streams can be characterized according to their academic roots. Representative Bureaucracy is generally grounded in political science scholarship, with some influence from political economy. Public Choice mainly stems from political economy and economics. Public Service Motivation research mainly derives from sociology, psychology and organizational behavior.

**Substantive Form.** Using Pitkin’s typology of substantive forms of representation, differences among the streams of research can be identified. In
the representative bureaucracy literature focusing on active representation bureaucrats are generally characterized as conforming to the trustee role. In theory passive representative assumes a delegate posture but there is little empirical evidence of delegate-behavior. In the public choice model bureaucrats are seen as politicos because they believe their role is to advance a particular ideological perspective. In the public service motivation stream, bureaucrats seem closest to trustees.

**Scope.** Scope, or inclusiveness, is one area where the models differ. Scope pertains to the share of the membership of the bureaucracy that is assumed to be covered by the model of motivation or behavior. In the representative bureaucracy literature, it appears that the ideas of trustee and delegate are assumed to cover most public employees. In the public choice literature, the politico posture appears to be considered universal. For example, Downs’ (1957: 27) point of departure is that “…every agent acts in accordance with [the self-interested] view”… of human behavior. There are different interpretations of the public service motivation model, but most of the main scholars in the field see this as a behavior that applies to a subgroup of employees. Work in the field can also be distinguished by whether it defines public service motivation as exclusive to the public sector and public or non-profit institutions (for example, Gabris and Simo 1995; Houston 2000) or an ethic that is defined by underlying motives and behaviors rather than the sector in which it occurs (for example Rainey, 1982; Brewer and Selden 1995; Pfiffner 1999; Wise 2000).

**Researcher’s World View.** The worldview category pertains to the scholars within this field. Scholars in the representative bureaucracy tradition, for example, can be characterized as idealistic. Public choice advocates have labeled them “naïve.” They see the effects of greater membership heterogeneity as only positive. Public service motivation scholars are also idealistic overall, focusing on the most positive aspects of human need structures. Some scholars in this stream dress public servants in such fine garments of altruistic and self-sacrificing motives that they seem more like saints than public officials. Public choice scholars have a rational view of the world and assume that individuals are driven to maximize their benefits. Their view of bureaucratic behavior has been described as simplistic.

**Human Nature.** The streams of literature can be distinguished by their view of human nature. Representative bureaucracy literature reflects a mixed view of human nature. On the one hand, there is the positive expectation that human nature is basically good and bureaucrats will serve as trustees or delegates of the public interest. Some scholars speak for the need to trust and have confidence in bureaucrats and their use of discretion (see for example Hyneman, 1950). On the hand, some scholars in this tradition speak for the need for rules and regulations, and other mechanisms to hold people accountable and protect the public interest and minimize fraud and abuse in the performance of public duties.

Public service motivation research generally expresses a positive view of human nature and suggests a belief that people are basically good. At least there
is little discussion in this literature about those who are motivated by corrupt values or self-serving interests. A less positive view of human nature is found in the public choice literature where rational behavior might be interpreted to mean that people are basically bad and corruptible. Academic interest in administrative rules and structures and other efforts to protect the public interest and assure bureaucratic performance would likely vary based on perspective.

**Figure 1. ATTRIBUTES OF 3 APPROACHES TO STUDYING THE BUREAUCRATIC BEHAVIOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH/ATTRIBUTE</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY</th>
<th>PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION</th>
<th>PUBLIC CHOICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantive form</td>
<td>TRUSTEE mainly</td>
<td>TRUSTEE</td>
<td>POLITICO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope/coverage</td>
<td>Applies to most</td>
<td>Applies to some/few</td>
<td>All/most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World view</td>
<td>Idealistic</td>
<td>Idealistic</td>
<td>Rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human nature</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat's posture</td>
<td>Neutral/</td>
<td>Neutral/advocate</td>
<td>Self interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on public interest</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on bureaucratic performance</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bureaucrat's Posture.** In the trustee model of representative bureaucracy, the bureaucrat’s posture can best be described as neutral. In the delegate form of representation, posture is more likely to be that of an advocate for a given group’s special interest. In the public service motivation model, the bureaucrat would be expected to combine neutrality and advocacy. In the public choice perspective the bureaucrat’s posture would be described as self-interested.

**Overall Impact on Public Interest.** The different research streams envision different overall impacts that bureaucrats have on the advancement of the public interest. Generally, we assume a positive effect in both forms of representative bureaucracy as well as in the public service motivation model. The public choice stream would assess the overall impact of the bureaucracy on the public interest as negative.
**Overall Impact on Bureaucratic Performance.** With regard to bureaucratic performance the expectation would be that representative bureaucracy would expect that a functional bureaucracy would have positive effects on organizational performance. The same would be true for research in the public service motivation tradition. Public choice-based scholarship would likely expect the bureaucracy to create inefficiencies that would have negative effects on organizational performance.

### III Toward a Composite Theory of Bureaucratic Behavior

This review suggests current approaches are too narrow and reveals a need for a more composite approach to the study of the bureaucracy and its impact on the public interest and bureaucratic performance. Alternative theories and models pertaining to the organizational consequences of human can be found in sociology, psychology, organizational behavior, and business management which give insight into the development of composite approach.

Figure 2 summarizes the key attributes of the model. A composite model of bureaucratic behavior would envision multiple substantive forms of representation based on the belief that people vary in both behavior and perception and thus individuals would assume different roles and postures as public officials. This would be consistent with Rainey’s (1982) proposition that individuals have different perceptions of public service motivation, for example. We can anticipate that individuals would also have different perceptions of their role and duties as public servants and would therefore assume different postures in their official positions.

A composite approach would assume that individual bureaucrats display multiple postures, in some cases neutral officials, in others advocates for individual and collective interests, and in still others self interested and self-serving. The scope of such a model would be the entire bureaucratic work force. Such a model would emphasize the importance of contextual factors both internal to and external to the bureaucracy. A composite theory of bureaucratic behavior would assume that bureaucrats vary in their attitudes, policy preferences, and postures according to their level of government.

A composite model would take a pragmatic worldview based on an understanding of the complexity of human nature and the challenges presented by the pursuit of organizational effectiveness and the public interest. Both positive and negative effects would be anticipated from a more inclusive bureaucracy and scholarship might focus on how to get the advantages from greater representativeness or heterogeneity while minimizing the costs.

In comparison with the representative bureaucracy literature where shared values are mainly seen as a positive feature, the composite model would recognize both positive and negative outcomes from shared values. Value congruence may affect the likelihood that an individual will express personal values in decisions involving discretion and thus enhances communication processes and inclusiveness of ideas. Groups with shared values and norms will work more efficiently than groups with difference value preferences and norms. On the other hand, shared values may create a group think dynamic which limits
the array of solutions considered and may lower group effectiveness in other ways. Lindblom (1959), for example, early identified some of the disadvantages of “likemindedness” and anticipated the benefits of greater representativeness or diversity within an organization for problem solving and policy choices. Evidence from numerous empirical studies indicates that performance efficiency is lower in heterogeneous groups than in homogeneous groups (Wise and Tschirhart 2000). March and Olsen (1989) provide an insightful discussion of the mixed implications of heterogeneity in value preferences for public agencies.

A composite approach would assume that human nature is mixed, people are both good and bad and members of different groups or sectors of employment cannot be assumed to fall into one category of the other. It would employ a mixed model of behavior that captures the range of possible behaviors within this mixture. Human beings are complex and may be motivated by different human needs at different times. This approach would be consistent with contingency theories of management where no one behavioral approach to management is always correct and managers adjust their management style based upon the nature of a given work group or individual. Managers would be required to know and understand human differences so that they could diagnose clues in individual behavior and the work environment that would signal how management style should vary. Similarly, the appropriateness of different mechanisms for administrative control and accountability would vary substantially from one case to another depending upon the dominant characteristics of the membership.

A composite theory of bureaucratic behavior would also seem to have benefits for the study of the linkage between membership and the pursuit of the public interest. If we accept that the public interest is derived from the combination of private, special and collective interests of a given population that it is not static but changes and evolves, it follows that the composite approach is especially germane. A main purpose of actively managing existing heterogeneity within a given workforce is to achieve synergistic solutions. The knowledge of which actions or policies are in the interest of the public comes not from individual bureaucrats who speak for private or special interests and limited personal experience or professional training but from the collective bureaucracy that weighs prevalent and competing interests against current and future needs.

Research from a contingency perspective would anticipate both positive and negative impacts of membership heterogeneity on bureaucratic performance. It would reject the simple linear relationship between heterogeneity and performance that characterizes some studies of the bureaucracy. Drawing on empirical findings from different fields, it would discount the idea that all forms of human difference are equally relevant to performance and assert the importance of contextual and institutional factors as intervening variables affecting the relationship between heterogeneity and performance. The practical applications of this assumption would be that managers would actively manage existing differences to remove potential barriers to effective work performance and create appropriate conditions for heterogeneous groups within the bureaucracy to be successful.
Figure 2. ATTRIBUTES OF A COMPOSITE APPROACH TO BUREAUCRATIC ROLES AND POSTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRIBUTE</th>
<th>COMPOSITE APPROACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantive form</td>
<td>trustee, delegate, &amp; politico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>all bureaucrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview</td>
<td>pragmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human nature</td>
<td>Mixed- good and bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat’s posture</td>
<td>Mixed- advocate, self-interest, neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on public interest</td>
<td>mixed -positive and negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on performance</td>
<td>mixed- positive and negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV Conclusions

This exploratory paper has identified three streams of research that study the effects of the composition of the bureaucracy on the public interest and bureaucratic performance. Evidence suggests that each stream of research has some merit for explaining bureaucratic behavior. As others have noted, there are significant weaknesses in this body of research and the pool of knowledge about the relationship between representativeness or composition and specific outcomes is very shallow. We have very limited usable knowledge about the range of behaviors occurring in a bureaucracy. Nor do we know what bureaucrats themselves consider the ideal posture.

This paper takes as a starting point the need to develop the body of scholarship in this field and suggests that research might benefit from an examination of the underlying values and assumptions that characterize different schools of thought. From this comparison, it became apparent that there were inconsistencies within schools as well as important commonalities and differences across research streams. Recognizing and exploring these differences and commonalities might provide opportunities to advance our theories and models of key relationships, provide insight into the reasons for our preferences for some approaches and rejection of others, and allow us to advance the level of scholarship on the consequences of membership in the public service. To the extent that each of these streams of research provide insight into the behavior of some subgroup of bureaucrats, it seems worthwhile for scholars in the field to explore the possibility of marrying components from different streams in both theory and field research in order to develop a model that applies to the great majority of members of the public service. To the extent that we focus on one bureaucratic posture (for example, trustee or politico), or one set of motives (for example, public service motives or self-interest) our findings will always offer a skewed view of bureaucratic behavior and its consequences. Since it would encompass a wider array of behaviors and a greater share of the membership, a composite theory of bureaucratic behavior would appear to have greater potential for insight into how bureaucrats are motivated and how the bureaucracy impacts the public interest and overall organizational performance.
A critical need in efforts to study the composition of the bureaucracy is for evidence about the strength and distribution of different bureaucratic postures in agencies where management articulates clearly differentiated reward structures and contextual factors can be specified. Evidence might reveal the distribution of these different bureaucratic postures under a variety of management approaches to motivation. A manager might want to know the likely range in the proportion of employees most strongly or primarily motivated by self interest, public service, or trustee motives. A manager might want to know if a given bureaucrat’s behavior consistently or typically conforms to a particular role or if bureaucrats exhibit inconsistent and mixed postures in response to competing demands and loyalties. Our understanding of motives for work will be advanced if we can determine whether the distribution of certain postures within a workforce is related to sector of employment or unique to particular occupational groups. Above all, we need instruments sophisticated enough to capture the complexity of different constructs related to both motives for work and organizational outcomes.
References


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