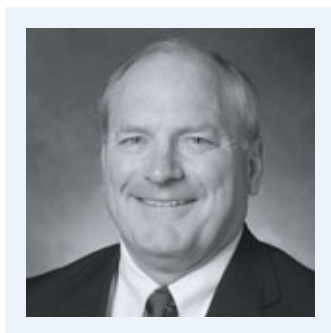


Organizations, Politics, and Public Purposes: Analyzing Public Organizations and Public Management

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The title of this lecture refers to organizations, politics, and public purposes to emphasize developments in the analysis of public organizations and their management and the need for that analysis to include politics as an influence on those organizations.



The Gaus Award recognizes contributions in the joint tradition of public administration and political science. Organizations serve as essential components of the administrative branch of government and of virtually all other aspects of human life and many other forms of life. Social scientists that I call “organization theorists” have developed theory and research about organizations and the people in them. This body of work provides concepts and insights useful for the analysis of the organizations in government, which I call “public organizations.” Organizations play crucial roles in the pursuit of values and goals shared by large aggregates of people. “Organizations, Politics, and Public Purposes: Analyzing Public Organizations and Public Management” refers to these shared values and goals as public purposes. Organizations are essential to public administration and we cannot effectively analyze organizations in public administration without concepts developed by political scientists; we need to draw on political science.

First, I want to address some seemingly simple questions about these topics and report on efforts to answer these questions. Can we identify and characterize a category of public organizations and distinguish them from other categories, such as private ones? Can we compare public and private organizations? I address challenges in seeking answers to these questions and provide an accounting of some of the efforts that I and other political scientists have made to answer these questions through research and theorizing. Second, I also discuss briefly research related to the questions I have posed, that do not necessarily compare public and private organizations, but that analyze important aspects of

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public organizations and public management. I do not offer a triumphal message, nor do I sermonize or proselytize. I want to provide an accounting of what I and others have done to try to answer the questions I have posed. I have sometimes advised young scholars who wanted to compare public and private organizations that such research is risky; there are serious challenges in attaining adequate samples and many of our colleagues express skepticism about such comparisons. Ultimately, however, the report will be positive.

Discussing comparisons of public and private organizations makes me reflect on how deeply I appreciate being nominated for the Gaus Award, but also on my lack of awareness that I had been nominated until I was informed that I had been selected. I have never learned who nominated me, nor why they did. Professor Sally Selden, in her generous introduction to my lecture, mentioned my work on comparisons of public and private organizations as one of the reasons for my selection. Therefore, I feel that I have implicit permission to discuss my work on this topic. It has been a primary means of trying to answer the simple questions I posed earlier.

An award such as the Gaus Award prompts reflection on times past, and I recall the many times that my interest in comparing public and private organizations has brought to mind Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s novella, *Le Petit Prince*. Early in the novel, the author reports that as a child, he drew a sketch of a large snake that had ingested a large animal. The drawing resembled a stick with a large lump in the middle of it. It looked very much like a hat. (I presented my own version of this drawing during my Gaus lecture). Saint-Exupery wrote that he showed the drawing to adults and asked if it scared them. They asked why anyone should be scared by a hat. “C’est un chapeau. It’s a hat.” The author meant that adults often respond without the open imagination of a child and respond to stimuli based on habits of thought and experience. Later in the story, he shows the drawing to the Little Prince, who expresses delight and immediate acceptance of the explanation that this drawing depicts a well-fed snake.

Well-educated, experienced social scientists such as those in attendance at the Gaus Lecture would never impose a preconceived or habitual response on a stimulus. I would not be surprised, however, if some of them responded to my drawing of a snake with a great bulge in its middle by thinking, “Is that a standard normal distribution? Is that supposed to be a normal curve?” I do not mean to accuse my colleagues of being narrow-minded.

Rather, I want to use this exercise in snake drawing to introduce an important aspect of my experience in comparing public and private organizations. When I began research on this topic years ago, I would tell other researchers about my interest in comparing public and private organizations. Many of them reacted dismissively or even scornfully, saying that the topic was simplistic or ill-informed, because the public and private sectors are indistinct. Others, a smaller group, would say the distinctions were obvious and well-known. I felt misunderstood, like the child whose snake kept getting seen as a hat. I only wanted to pursue answers to the questions I posed earlier, that I considered important and interesting, but people told me that they were not.

It was actually presumptuous of a child to think that adults should recognize that a drawing that looked very much like a hat was supposed to be a sated snake. I had to realize that I needed to make myself clear about my interest. My colleagues' reactions relate to important issues about this line of research, that I began to encounter in graduate school. When I was in graduate school in public administration, I became very interested in the study of organizations and the people in them, and hence the field that I and others call organization theory. At that time, at Ohio State University, the public administration program (since then renamed and relocated) was located in the College of Administrative Sciences with the business school. My major professor, Robert Backoff, was a political scientist, but he also had a strong interest in organization theory. I took courses from the various excellent professors in the business school on organization theory, organizational behavior, and related topics such as leadership research. The courses and the materials we used tended to concentrate on business firms or

reform their governmental personnel systems to strengthen the relations between rewards to an employee, particularly pay, and the employee's performance. The assumption guiding these reforms holds that government employees' extrinsic rewards are not tied closely to their job performance, and that they should be. Frequently, reformers claim that business firms tie pay and other rewards to performance, and this enhances individual and organizational performance, and government must emulate business in this regard. Yet here, one of the greatest social scientists contends that reward systems in government, business, and the nonprofit sectors are "precisely the same." In the text later, I show evidence that the managers in government agencies strongly disagree with Professor Simon. The literature in this generic tradition, however, as compared to literature in public administration at the time, did offer richer, deeper analysis of numerous topics in organizations and management. At the organizational level, these included organizational goals and effectiveness, decision-making and strategic planning, organizational structure and design, organizational change, and other topics. At the individual level, concerning organizational behavior, these included work motivation and productivity, work-related attitudes such as work satisfaction, teams and groups, and leadership. Certainly public administration and political science had valuable material relevant to these topics, but not nearly as extensive and intensive analysis.

At the same time, in public administration we were reading about alternative perspectives. These included the work of public choice economists such as James Buchanan, who later won the Nobel Prize, and Gordon Tullock. The economist Anthony

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on a "generic" approach that treats organizations and management as facing similar issues and challenges in many different settings, including government, business, and the nonprofit settings. This perspective treated organizations and management in those three settings as fundamentally similar. Prominent organizational theorists have published statements condemning a distinction between public, private, and nonprofit organizations as a crude stereotype and oversimplification. This quotation from the Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon, the most prominent scholar ever to contribute to public administration, organization theory, and many other topics, illustrates this perspective. Writing about economic reward systems in organizations, Simon said:

"... Everything said here about economic rewards applies equally to privately owned, nonprofit, and government-owned organizations. The opportunity for, and limits on, the use of rewards to motivate activities towards organizational goals are precisely the same in all three kinds of organizations..." (Simon 1995, p. 283, footnote 3).

Professor Simon's statement has major implications for those of us interested in public administration and for my humble efforts to compare public and private organizations. Governments at all levels, in nations around the world, have sought to

Downs' book, *Inside Bureaucracy*, was a very prominent analysis of government bureaucracy. We read economist William Niskanen's book, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, with its analysis concluding that government bureaucrats maximize their budgets. Political scientists had developed a valuable literature that we called the bureaucratic politics literature on the nature of the governmental bureaucracy, and political scientists continue to develop this topic. These contributions from economists and political scientists varied widely among themselves, and they did not provide as rich an analysis of organizational processes and behaviors as that of the organization theorists. Yet, they did provide a richer analysis of the political and economic contexts of organizations, and they expressed a perspective opposite from the generic orientation to organizations that I mentioned above. They implied or explicitly argued that government organizations have distinctive characteristics as compared to other types of organizations such as business firms. Scholars in public administration were also already working on the distinctive characteristics of public administration and public organizations (Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976). Laurence Lynn (1981) has reminded us that "management" has long been a topic in public administration, but during this period he published

thoughtful discussions of management in government that further stimulated interest in management in the public sector. Authors in the United Kingdom pointed to the value of organization theory in analyzing public organizations (Hood and Dunshire 1981; Pitt and Smith 1981).

The social sciences present many examples of groups of researchers with diametrically opposing views about the same topic or focal issue. We had such a situation in this case, in which one group, mostly organizations psychologists and sociologists, regarded a distinction between public and private organizations as useless or even harmful, while another group, mostly political scientists and economists, treated the distinction as rather obvious and undeniable. Of course, there are many journalists, politicians, and others who treat the distinctions as obvious. This is one of the reasons organization theorists consider the distinction dubious, because it often draws on crude stereotypes.

Now, this becomes interesting. On the one hand, we know that a public versus private distinction faces many problems. The so-called sectors are mixed and blurred together in myriad ways, preventing a clear distinction. Governments contract for goods and services with business and nonprofit organizations: those organizations deliver services to the citizens on behalf of government. Business organizations influence government decisions through political processes. Public and private organization perform the same functions, in education, electric and other utilities, transportation services, and numerous other service areas or functions. People in the two settings do the same things; there are attorneys, accountants, custodial staff, scientists, and engi-

year. In other words, the salaries of the highest government officials in the United States amount to rounding errors in the compensation levels of a large group of executives in the corporate sector. There is no difference between the public and private sectors?

As another example of the obviousness of the public-private distinction, consider the issue of privatization of government services and activities. Nations around the world have engaged in difficult decisions about the roles assigned to government and to nongovernment entities, and what should be privatized and how. Trillions of dollars of assets have been in play in such decisions. If there is no difference between public and private sectors and between public and private organizations, let us simplify these decisions by flipping a coin.

DEFINING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS

What can we do? We can try to define public and private and identify dimensions along which these two categories vary and differ. The challenge comes from numerous ways of conceiving and defining public and private. The concept of public and private domains has a rich and classic history involving matters such as what can a person keep to themselves as their own, and what they must divulge or to what they must allow public access. Thoughtful discussions of public and private point out that public can refer to public access, public agency, or public interests (Benn and Gaus 1983). Such distinctions can actually conflict with each other; a military base purportedly operates as an agent for us as members of the public and defends public interests when it defends us,

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neers doing very similar work in the different sectors. Governments create hybridized organizations, with a diversity of designs and names, including state-owned enterprises, government authorities, government corporations, government-sponsored corporations, and others. Some business firms sell so much of their output to governments that they become virtual appendages to government. Fifty years ago, an economist wrote that some corporations that produce weapons systems for the US Department of Defense had essentially become government agencies exempt from competitive economic markets and subject to direction by governmental authorities.

So, the public and private categories are indistinct in important ways. Yet, we regularly use concepts that social scientists have trouble precisely defining and conclusively analyzing. Although the public versus private distinction has weaknesses, the distinction for certain applications is obvious and undeniable. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that the chief financial officer (CFO, not the top executive, the chief executive officer or the CEO) of a major corporation, received aggregate compensation—again, not the CEOs—received tens of millions of dollars in total compensation in 2010. The President of the United States has a salary of \$400,000 a year. The Secretary of the US Treasury has a salary of \$196,700 a

but military representatives may deny us access to the base or parts of it for security purposes. Economists have developed the concept of public goods that have the characteristics of rivalry in consumption and excludability in access. If we try to identify the public domain as the place where they produce public goods, we find that there are few pure public goods, and public goods tend to be imprecise in their public character and overlapping with private goods in various ways. Why do we have public parks and public schools when we could easily privatize them by getting government out of those activities and leaving it up to private providers charging user fees? It seems that such activities produce outputs with a public goods character, in certain ways, but that they can be produced privately. The complications with using the concept of the public interest have been so thoroughly discussed for so long that I do not review them here.

Again, what to do? We can say that a public organization is an organization owned and operated by government, as opposed to an organization owned by private, nongovernmental groups or individuals. I will show you that researchers have found differences between categories of organizations and managers identified by this simple distinction. Many scholars and experts, remarkably, still appear to consider it insightful and original to point out that the sectors are blurred and hybridized, when

people have been making that point for many decades. About six decades ago, two of the leading political scientists published a book in which they addressed the blurring of the sectors. Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom (1953) observed that nations must use and often blend two major organizing patterns for political economies, governments and markets. They referred to the governmental institutional environment as “polyarchy” and referred to organizations under these auspices as “agencies.” Organizations that are, in a sense, organized by markets, they called “enterprises.” They discussed the strength and weaknesses of polyarchy and market systems, and Lindblom (1977) later elaborated this discussion in his book, *Politics and Markets*. Dahl and Lindblom claimed (without clear evidence) that agencies were more subject to the dysfunctions of bureaucracy and hierarchy, such as red tape, buck-passing, rigidity, and timidity. Members of agencies have less incentive to control and reduce costs, they said, because they do not face the incentives for cost reduction that the price system imposes on enterprises. Agencies, they wrote, have more diverse and multiple objectives than enterprises, among which cost reduction is often weak or absent. Thus, Dahl and Lindblom claimed that two distinct categories of organizations existed, and that the two categories differ in important ways. I disagree with many of these observations as generalizations about all or most public organizations, but Dahl and Lindblom provide justification for empirical research on such differences between agencies and enterprises.

At the same time, they noted the mixed and hybrid forms of organization that fell between these two categories by blending characteristics from both categories. They recognized the existence of state-owned enterprises, enterprises and nonprofit organizations that sell most of their output to government or get most of their financial resources from government contracts, enterprises subject to heavy government regulation, and government agencies that operate through purchases from private vendors and producers (such as Medicare).

In sum, two of the most prominent political scientists recognized the mixing and hybridization of the sectors a long time ago, but they went on to observe that there are important differences between the organizations clearly under government auspices (“polyarchy”) or clearly owned by nongovernmental groups and selling products and services on markets.

Somewhat later, public administration scholar Gary Wamsley and sociologist Mayer Zald (Wamsley and Zald 1973) refined this distinction by pointing out that one can classify organizations along two dimensions—(1) ownership and (2) source of funding. Some organizations are owned by government and receive the major proportion of their funding from government sources, such as budget allocations by a legislative body. We can call these public organizations. Other organizations are owned by private, nongovernmental groups and receive very little funding from government; these are private organizations. Two other categories of organizations include those for which there is a mixture of government ownership and funding. Governments own some organizations that receive a major portion of their funding from private sources. State-owned enterprises, for example, sell products or services to customers at a price. Groups and individuals other than government own some organizations that obtain a major portion of their funding from government. Some private corporations produce most of their products for the defense department and obtain most of their revenue from government contracts for their products.

The Wamsley and Zald classification has limitations, as does any two-dimensional classification system portraying the dimensions as dichotomies. The break point between public and private funding is not specified. There is no provision for types such as private firms that are very heavily regulated by government and thus subject to strong governmental controls, yet they are privately owned and receive their funding from sales on markets (for example, private electric utilities). Nor does this classification procedure account for the actual mixing of these types of organizations in a policy or service delivery system. Examples of such admixtures abound, as when the US military organizations contract with private firms to carry out functions previously discharged by US military personnel, or when reforms of the National Health Service in the UK lead to service delivery by combinations of government and private providers. Still, the classification shows that it comes close to absurdity to contend that we cannot distinguish between groups of organizations that we can call public or private. Organization theorists have suggested other ways of categorizing organizations by whether they operate in environments of high uncertainty or low uncertainty, or whether they apply technologies that are routine or nonroutine. Consider where we put the US Department of State on such dimensions, as compared to Microsoft Corporation. Does State face a more uncertain environment than Microsoft? Does State apply a more nonroutine technology? I have trouble making such distinctions. Now, is the State Department public or private? How about Microsoft? They must have a lot of government contracts and sales to government. Are they public or private?

Our colleague Barry Bozeman (1987) then proposed that we conceive of two dimensions similar to those of Wamsley and Zald but expressed as political and economic authority and conceived as dimensions rather than dichotomies. He suggested that we regard organizations as falling at different points along two continua. One continuum involves political authority, meaning control by government authorities but also authorization to act on behalf of government. The second continuum involves financial or economic authority, meaning the authority to control the financial assets and revenues of the organization. Organizations, according to Bozeman, can be arrayed along these dimensions with higher or lower degrees of “publicness.”

These classification methods have various limitations, but they show that we can designate two groups of organizations and then seek evidence as to whether or not they differ on important characteristics. Yet the situation presents us with a choice about how to proceed. I started by trying to compare samples of government owned and funded organizations, and the managers in them, to privately owned and funded organizations and managers.

Even a simple-sounding step such as this comparison involves some fundamental decisions similar to those that we all face in research. First, even if you simply compare public and private organizations, how do you represent those two populations of organizations in research? I recently published an article in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* about the different choices one might make for sampling in the study of publicness or public versus private, and the pros and cons (Rainey 2011). I do not have to review these complications here because those attending the Gaus Lecture and reading this written version will recognize the complexities. Social scientists have developed very impressive theory and procedure for constructing representative samples. Even when we identify representative

samples, however, human beings often show reluctance to participate. Humans representing organizations show even more reluctance. Furthermore, studying organizations raises major challenges in attaining agreement from organizations to participate and in attaining an adequate response rate if the organization's representatives agree to cooperate. Organizational researchers have responded to this and other complications by using samples of opportunity or judgmental samples. They often conduct research on samples of individuals who are available to them.

We face this problem in studying public and private organizations and the people in them. Other colleagues and I have used opportunity samples of small sets of public and private organizations, but do small samples represent the complex sectors? Although we can compare public and private versions of the same functional categories, there are sharp limits to such sampling procedures. Do differences between public and private schools apply to public and private electric utilities? In the United States and other nations, the populations of organizations contain organizations that do not match organizations in the opposite sector, such as the Department of State in the United States. In addition, we face the complication that public and private organizations within the same functional category may not carry out the general function in the same way. The private versions, for example, have often engaged in "creaming" or skimming the cream by choosing those activities and clients in a policy or service domain that are the most feasible and profitable, leaving the tougher cases to the public sector.

Ideally, we would like to have a large, elaborate national or international sample of organizations or individuals representing the two sectors, as well as the hybrid types of organizations. I know of only one such sample, and I cite it frequently because the team of organizational sociologists who conducted the study found some interesting differences among public, private, and non-profit organizations. Such samples are costly in resources, and face response rate complications. In addition, if you seek to draw information from a lot of people in a lot of different places around a nation, you face greater difficulties in drawing information in the depth and richness that you would like.

Researchers have taken various approaches to this sampling challenge (Perry and Rainey 1988). We have interviews or testimonials from executives and managers who have served in government and business. We have qualitative studies of small sets of managers in which the researcher observed differences between the managers in government and those in business. We have case studies of one or a small set of government organizations that drew conclusions about their distinctive characteristics. We have many studies that have compared small opportunity or judgmental samples of public and private organizations, and we have studies that have compared larger samples. We have one study that I know about that has drawn a national probability sample. We have many, many studies that have compared public and private versions of the same functional type of activity.

In addition, as you know, we face the question of how we gather information. For the most part, those of us studying public versus private differences across sets of organizations have primarily asked people questions. We have used questionnaire surveys.

My research assistants and I have compiled 125 studies using one of these approaches to comparing samples of public organizations or personnel to private organizations or personnel. We have reviewed another 20 articles reporting studies of "public-

ness" that usually involve such comparisons. This collection of studies can be considered rather large, because these studies pose the sampling challenges and other challenges that make them difficult to carry out. Relative to research on a number of other topics, such as work satisfaction about which there have been thousands of individual studies, this collection of public and private comparisons appears rather small. This body of research also shows various limitations. As indicated earlier, the samples are sometimes small opportunity or judgmental samples. Many of the studies including those published by me need much clearer and better theoretical development. That is, they often take an implicitly exploratory approach to the comparisons saying that some authors contend that public and private organizations differ. So, let us see if they do. The public and private categories serve as general indicators or proxies for the influences these contexts purportedly exert on organizations. One can contend that happens because we face great difficulty in directly observing how an economic market context influences decisions about structure and process in a business firm and how political authorities, such as legislative bodies, influence structure and process in a government agency (sometimes influences can be obvious, such as when the legislative body mandates them in legislation). Yet, we need more explicit theory about how such influences and other purported differences affect the two types of organizations as well as the more hybridized and overlapping forms of organization. We need to devise ways to test these more elaborated theories, and I intend to pursue such theoretical development and testing in my remaining career. We also need to find ways to relate the comparisons to important outcomes such as organizational effectiveness and performance (e.g., Heinrich 2003).

Another complication in reviewing and drawing conclusions from this body of research comes from the diversity of focal variables in the studies. The collection of studies includes studies focusing on many different dependent variables. The research comes from different nations and sometimes multiple nations in the same study. Furthermore, different studies compare public and private organizations on employee attitudes, leadership and managerial behaviors, organizational structure, and many other variables. Whatever criticisms one might aim at this set of studies, one cannot accuse their authors of a closely knit conspiracy. The diversity of the studies, however, provides evidence of the importance and viability of a public versus private distinction. One can readily abandon a research topic that produces no results. While these studies often fail to support hypothesis about public versus private differences, they usually do support hypotheses or they would not have been published.

The findings are often very strong. An example of this strength comes from a set of studies that my coauthor, Professor Mary Feeney, and I review in a recent journal article (Feeney and Rainey 2010). We point out that five surveys of managers in government agencies and business firms have asked the managers to agree or disagree with statements that under the personnel rules it is difficult to fire a poor performer and difficult to raise the pay of a good performer. In all of the studies, the government managers are much more likely to agree that it is difficult to fire and to raise pay, and the business managers are much more likely to disagree that it is difficult. In surveys in New York and in Ohio 20 years apart, for example, about 90% of the government managers agreed or strongly agreed that it was difficult to fire poor performers and to raise the pay of a good performer. The managers in business firms came close to a diametrically opposite

response with about 90% of them disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that it was difficult to fire and to raise pay. These and the other studies have actually used indexes combining questionnaire items similar to these and have used complex statistical analyses that included numerous control variables. The effect sizes for the analyses are very high as one should expect from the large percentage differences described above. In the social and administrative sciences, one does not often find such large differences between groups that are highly similar except for their distinction on one independent variable—in this case their location in the public and private sectors. The surveys that consistently produced these findings were conducted across several decades, in different parts of the nation, and with samples including different levels of government and many types of public and private organizations. Although the samples are not verifiably random and representative samples, the results cannot be attributed to biased samples.

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One can raise numerous issues about the validity of these findings and pose various alternative interpretations of them. I strongly oppose one interpretation that an author citing these findings has imposed on them, the interpretation that the findings indicate that government personnel systems are sharply dysfunctional and require radical reform. The findings certainly do not justify, for example, continued efforts to implement poorly designed pay-for-performance plans in government like those attempted without success at all levels of government in the United States and other nations.

These results do not necessarily support such negative interpretations. These surveys provide additional evidence that many public sector respondents who report that it is difficult to fire and to raise pay also perceive that their organizational units perform very well and otherwise express very positive attitudes. These findings are similar to those of the recent *Federal Viewpoints Survey* of more than 260,000 federal employees, conducted by the US Office of Personnel Management. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents indicated high motivation by saying that they would “put in extra effort to get a job done.” About 92% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “The work I do is important.” In contrast to these and other positive responses, only 26% agreed that pay raises depend on job performance and only 31% agreed that “. . . steps are taken to deal with a poor performer . . .” No one needs to explain to scholars in political science and public administration the possible limitations of these findings, such as positive response biases for some of the items. Still, the general consistency of responses of this survey and those mentioned previously supports the conclusion that the seemingly simple distinction between public and private organizations discussed earlier relates to very large differences in survey responses from respondents in the two categories.

The simplicity of these research results was one important reason to present them in the Gaus Lecture. They are straightforward and clear, easy to understand and to criticize, and quite strong

by the standards of the social and administrative sciences. We would be mistaken to underestimate the power of simplicity in this case. Note that these findings stand in sharp contrast to Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon’s statement, quoted earlier, that the capacity of managers to deliver rewards is “precisely the same” in public, private, and nonprofit organizations. They also contrast with the generic perspective on this topic, mentioned earlier. This in turn suggests their theoretical relevance. One example of theoretical implications is that the findings indicate perceptual and attitudinal influences of the institutional location of the respondent, that is, in government or in business, in ways consistent with organization sociologists’ analyses of institutional processes, and in contrast with some economists’ analyses of public bureaucracies.

The findings about raising pay and firing represent some of the largest differences found in comparisons of public and private organizations and employees, but the many studies mentioned earlier have produced many more. Space constraints here pre-

clude a full review of these studies. As noted, the studies vary widely among themselves in focal variables, and of course they support probabilistic or statistical generalizations rather than universal generalizations. That is, these indicate that many or most public organizations and employees show distinctive characteristics, rather than that all of them do. The studies have shown, however, that survey respondents from public organizations show consistent differences from those from private organizations in work-related values and reward preferences. Public sector respondents place higher value on rewards to altruistic, public service, and community service motives and indicate lower valuation of high salary as an ultimate goal in work. Various forms of evidence indicate that many leaders in public organizations play roles different in important ways from those at comparable levels in private organizations. The evidence also indicates frequent differences in organization structures and design characteristics of public organizations, in decision processes including strategic decisions, and in other important matters. In ways that are too detailed to discuss here, these distinctive characteristics tend to reflect the “public character” of the organizations involving influence by external political processes, governmental authorities, and in other ways.

As with all research in the social and administrative sciences, one can critique this body of research on various grounds. The research does, however, present a formidable body of evidence about the distinctions between public and private organizations and their management and the people in them. The research brings together research traditions in political science, public administration, general management, and organizational sociology and psychology in valuable ways.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Research comparing public and private organizations represents only one of multiple developments in research and professional

activity that contribute to the analysis of public organizations and public management. When I was a graduate student in the 1970s, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) was, with some limited exceptions, the only major professional association offering opportunities to report research on public administration and related topics such as research of public organizations. As part of its mission to serve the needs of practicing public administrators, ASPA also had a commitment that sometimes conflicted with the commitment to research. Since that time, the Public Administration Section of the American Political Science Association has been formed, and it now provides an outlet for conference papers reporting research in various topics related to public organizations and management. In the late 1970s, a network of professors established the Public Sector Division of the Academy of Management. This Academy is the leading association of professors and researchers on general management—mostly from schools of business management. Since then, it has expanded from a relatively small division of the Academy to a large and active Public and Nonprofit Division that serves as another outlet for reporting research. Another network of researchers, many of whom were associated with the Public Sector Division of the Academy at the time, began to convene the Public Management Research Conference (PMRC) every two years. This conference explicitly welcomed research and theory on “public management” including research using advanced statistical and analytic methods without emphasis on its immediate usefulness to practitioners. These developments in professional association activity have significantly expanded support for research on public organizations and management as well as other related topics.

Similarly, new journals have provided outlets for research. The PMRC activities led to the founding of the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)*. *JPART* now has joined *Public Administration Review* as a major journal for research on topics in public administration, including public management. In recent years, *JPART* has had the highest “impact factor” rating among the 39 journals in the public affairs category assessed by the Web of Science/Social Science Citation Index. Numerous additional journals that provide outlets for research on public organizations and management have been founded or have substantially improved in quality. Significantly, these journals number about a dozen, and space precludes their description here.

In sum, professional activities and journal outlets supporting research on public organizations and their management have been enhanced in quantity and quality. Researchers on this topic and related ones have more opportunities than were available several decades ago.

STREAMS OF RESEARCH RELATED TO PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The professional associations and the journals reflect an increase in research activity. The comparison of public and private organizations, as noted earlier, is only one approach to the analysis of such organizations and their management. The research on this topic and related topics has become so rich and active that a review and description would be prohibitively voluminous. The following sampling of topics that researchers are developing, however, provides examples of this activity. I do not present these topics in order of importance or priority, nor do I intend to imply their greater importance than other topics receiving attention.

One direction for research is to examine topics that the discussion of public versus private distinctions treats as important, but analyzing the topic with samples including only public sector organizations. The most frequent observation in all the literature on comparisons of public and private organizations contends that public organizations’ goals are more multiple, conflicting, and intangible than those of private business firms. Little research examines this ubiquitous claim, however, probably because the topic of organizational goals is extremely elusive. Professor Young Han Chun of Seoul National University in Korea, when he was a student in the United States, conducted prize-winning research on this topic (Chun and Rainey 2005). From strategic plans published by all US federal agencies, he developed measures of several dimensions of goal ambiguity of the agencies. He found convincing relationships between these measures and other agency characteristics. For example, regulatory agencies show higher levels of goal ambiguity, as much of the relevant literature would predict. Agencies low on “financial publicness,” that is, those that receive less of their financial resources from federal budget allocations and more from sales and user charges, show lower levels of goal ambiguity. This result affords a version of a public versus private comparison. The federal organizations that are purportedly more business-like because they sell their outputs show less goal ambiguity. This is consistent with what much of the literature contends, but without systematic evidence. Later, Professor Jung Wook Lee of Yonsei University in Korea demonstrated that agencies with higher levels of external “salience” to political actors, such as Congress, the president, and the media, have higher levels of goal ambiguity; the more attention from external political stakeholders, the more complicated the goal set (Lee, Rainey, and Chun 2009).

Our colleagues Kenneth J. Meier and Laurence J. O’Toole (2006; 2011) have produced a carefully conceived and systematically tested stream of research on the topic of public management by developing a model of public management. The model contains components representing organizational outcomes, the manager’s exploitation and buffering of the organizational environment, the manager’s contributions to organizational stability, and other factors. They have published numerous articles and two books reporting their analyses of evidence on school district administrators in Texas, examining such topics as the value of management itself in influencing educational outcomes, the role of managerial networking, the role of bureaucratic values in influencing the impact of external political controls on the bureaucracy, and other topics.

Networks of actors and organizations, often including representations of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, play important roles in the activities of public organizations and in public policy processes and service delivery (e.g., Agranoff 2007; Provan and Milward 1995; O’Toole 2010). Researchers have produced a substantial body of research and thought on this topic with articles and books on it appearing with sustained momentum.

The venerable topic of representativeness in government has received active attention from researchers in this domain of analysis of public management and public organizations, with emphasis on representation of demographic groups in the government bureaucracy (e.g., Choi 2009; Pitts 2005; Wilkins and Wenger 2009; Wilkins, Whitford, and Ball 2008). Among other contributions they have made, some of these studies have shown ways in which representation of disadvantaged groups can enhance bureaucratic outcomes for those groups. Relatedly, some researchers have

developed clearly conceived and methodologically astute analyses of the topic of diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender or sex, and diversity's role in government agencies.

Books and articles have advanced research and thinking about change and innovation in government organizations (e.g., Borins 1998; Fernandez and Rainey 2006; Kelman 2005). Some of these authors show evidence of the effective role of government managers and employees—of career civil servants—as leaders and supportive participants in successful change and innovation processes.

Privatization of government activities through contracting and other modes has been going on since at least the formation of the republic in the United States, but it has expanded substantially in recent decades. Early in these years of expansion, various authors and advocates touted privatization as a cure for poorly performing government. They did not recognize that this advocacy faced an irony of privatization. The ideologically driven advocates touted privatization as a panacea for bad government, but it takes good government to make it work. More recently, several authors, many of them scholars in public administration and political science, have produced valuable research and analysis that has developed what we can characterize as a pragmatic contingency approach to privatization. They have developed ways of deciding when and how privatization and contracting can work, and how these processes can be managed.

As emphasized earlier, this sampling is just that. It is meant to illustrate the point that within the academic field of public administration, often at its interstices with subdomains of political science, sociology, psychology, and general management, scholars applying the research methods of the social and administrative sciences have developed valuable streams of research. This research often focuses on public organizations and their management and always has relevance for that topic. Our colleagues in other fields, and sometimes our colleagues in public administration and political science, have sometimes characterized public administration as a field deficient in quantity and quality of systematic analytical research. Critics may continue to express such concerns, and any of us can deliver a critique of the research I have described here, including my own, as we can for most research activity in the social sciences. Within public administration in academics and in practice, some of our colleagues will further lament that a focus on abstract, theoretical, and methodologically complex research will draw us too far away from usefulness to practical applications. Against these perspectives, for which we all need to show our respect, let me advance an alternative claim that in public administration, often drawing from political science and other social sciences, a cadre of scholars has developed and continues to develop a body of research on public organizations and management and related topics. This research often uses sophisticated conceptualization and methodology. Does this research have value for intellectual understanding and for practical applications? The answer is yes. ■

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