

Week 14

Where are we now? Get out the map: PA's response to Plunkitt will be to bridge the gap between bureaucracy and democracy by building new organizations. In this process, our hands as managers will be tied by bureaucratic rigidity, vague goals, diffusion of implementation responsibility, penetration of the task environment, limited power over employees, conflicts over how and whether to use information, constant demands for increased productivity for tasks that are not very amenable to such improvements, the ever present pressure to lower taxes while delivering more services, political pressure to make hiring and firing decision for political and ideological reasons, limited control over the policy process, and pressure to privatize public services even though competition among providers may be limited and accountability may be difficult to insure. We will also be working in an institutional environment in which different levels of government are in conflict and in which there is often profound disagreement over the proper role of the federal government, even though states and cities have come to rely on intergovernmental transfers to balance their budgets.

Prefatory Notes for Chapter 13: This chapter brings us back to the basic issues raised by Tweed and Plunkitt. Tweed was a thief, though he was adept at getting things done. As with many political bosses, Tweed's enviable success as building infrastructure (roads, bridges, parks, docks), for example, came at too high a price: he was serving himself more than he was serving the public. Plunkitt, though perhaps not quite as rapacious as Tweed, still seemed more interested in serving himself, and his lifelong cause of getting re-elected, than in serving the public. This is not to say that he was indifferent to the public; indeed, he provided jobs and resources to those who voted for him. But with Plunkitt as well, the price seemed too high; and it was unclear whether his efforts to respond to public needs were going to alleviate problems or simply perpetuate them and capitalize upon them for political and personal gain. What is the alternative? At several spots in the text, Henry has complained that the response to Tweed and Plunkitt tended to produce bureaucrats who might be honest, but not very effective. The desire to avoid corruption resulted in red tape that slowed the process of governance to a crawl and reduced efficiency. This chapter further complicates the problem by adding to the long list of things we now expect from good public administration: it is not enough to be honest, effective, efficient, and responsive; administrators must also be just and promote fairness. Recall that Henry has also said that one of the things that makes public organizations different from private companies is the fact that their missions are less clear (justice, though compelling, is hard to define) and they are more affected by their environments; where there are social injustices and where addressing those injustices requires redistribution of resources, the public mission can become overwhelming. What values do you think should guide the efforts of public administrators as they carry out the public's business? Is it enough to be efficient and effective? Should public administrators have goals beyond good service delivery, such as fairness and justice? What values will you bring to your work as a public administrator?

Henry makes the case that public administration is a distinctive undertaking, not subsumed under political science or management or business, even though public objectives are nowadays pursued by a growing range of institutions, including the private sector and the nonprofit sector. Public administrators are pledged to pursuing the public interest. Because that is hard to define and difficult to pursue, especially in organizations that can be inflexible and yet open to a broad

range of environmental influences, it is essential that public employees adhere to ethical principles in their work. This chapter briefly describes the kinds of considerations that come into play in a discussion of public ethics. How to hire and promote, how to award contracts, how to distribute services – these involve ethical problems that deserve sustained attention.

Plunkitt was guided by a code of ethics, was he not? He believed in honest graft, not dishonest graft. But we would now consider graft dishonest by its very nature. Similarly, he believed that loyalty deserved to be rewarded, so a loyal Tammany man ought to get a public job and ought to get a promotion and ought to get “opportunities” in return for his loyal service. However, today we would regard his actions as wholly unethical and inappropriate, since they amount to rewarding administrators for responding to political pressure. He also believed in democracy, but we would now question whether the sort of participation he had in mind was really about getting re-elected rather than serving the public interests.

How do the administrators in the ICMA-TV videos compare? To what extent can a government help a contractor or business get what they need quickly and yet still remain ethical? Your guide to such issues will often be a code of ethical conduct adopted by your local government (see, for example, <http://www.miamidadeethics.com/> for the rules governing public employees in Miami-Dade County), but it is also important that you, as a public administrators, develop your ethical judgment for those occasions when the rules are not so clear cut and the pressure to behave unethically comes from unexpected sources. Remember that great public objectives cannot be pursued unethically, no matter how important they are.

Chapter Thirteen

TOWARD A BUREAUCRATIC ETHIC

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The importance of ethics in the public sector is discussed. Particular attention is paid to the development of formal codes of ethics as well as why ethics are important to public administration. The grounding of public ethics in normative theory is discussed before the chapter concludes with a request to do no harm through public service.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the role of ethical practices in public administration.
2. Explain why ethical behavior and decision-making makes for good business and for good public administration.
3. Compare and contrast philosophies of the public interest. Explain justice-as-fairness as the most workable philosophy for organizing the public organization.
4. Describe why moral/ethical public administration is important to good governance.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

CODES AND COMMISSIONS: THE RISE OF PUBLIC SECTOR ETHICS

Ethics for the Public Professions

Ethics for Governments

Federal Ethics

Grassroots' Ethics

Adopting and Implementing Ethics

PRACTICING ETHICAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The Ethical Environment of the Public Administrator

Committing to a Higher Standard

A Higher Ethical Standard

Walking the Ethical Walk

DO MORALS MATTER?

Ethics and the Effective Corporation

Ethics and the Effective Government

Ethics and the Effective Public Administrator

BUREAUCRACY'S BANE: DETERMINING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Bureaucratic Accountability

Internal Inhibitors and External Checks

What Do Public Administrators Use?

A Missed Point

Organizational Humanism

The Ultimate Bureaucratic Value

Applying Organizational Humanism: A Nonstarter

CAN NORMATIVE THEORY HELP? FOUR PHILOSOPHIES OF THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Intuitionism: Morally Muddling Through

Perfectionism: Promoting Perfect People

Utilitarianism: The Most Benefits for the Most People

Fairness: A Theory of Justice

Applying Fairness: A Real Starter

Does Philosophy Matter?

THE PASSION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (case study)

BIG BUREAUCRACY, BIG DECISIONS

KEY CONCEPTS/TERMS/INDIVIDUALS

codes of ethics

Office of Government Ethics

misconduct

ethical climate

stare decisis

judicial precedent

bureaucratic accountability

ombudsman

organizational humanism

intuitionism

perfectionism

utilitarianism

justice-as-fairness

Robert Moses