Although government's other institutions frame basic public policy, its bureaucracies have always been responsible for carrying it out. In fact, bureaucracy predates most of the institutions of modern democratic government. When Moses organized the tribes of Israel for their departure from Pharaoh's rule, he organized them into a simple bureaucracy as he sought to build them into a new nation. Millennia later, the Romans institutionalized a fighting force that terrified their enemies. The centurion commanded eighty men, which gathered into legions, and which led to the conquest of most of the known world. The locus of government action has long been in public bureaucracies. It is one thing for government officials to make decisions. It is quite another for them to carry out those decisions. Stalin famously mocked the Pope, sarcastically asking, "How many divisions does he have?" Government power is bureaucratic power, whether the bureaucracy is the military or another agency.

The term "bureaucracy" has deep roots. Its origin lies in the French word, bureau, at least as far back as the 1300s. The king's administrators brought their financial records to a special room, the Chamber of Accounts, and laid them out on brown woolen cloth, know as la bure. In time, they came to call the room the "bureau," and "bureaucracy" was born. Since then, bureaucracy has acquired a wide variety of meanings, some highly negative ("that's just so bureaucratic!"). More generally, however, "bureaucracy" refers to the complex organizations assigned to perform specific tasks. Its historical roots and most common usage apply to public bureaucracies. Bureaucracy, however, is a generic term, and private companies typically have bureaucracies as well. Understanding the reasons for bureaucracy's enduring use, the reasons why it sometimes has an unsavory reputation, and what steps reformers have taken to solve those problems provides a rich guide to government's inner workings. The key lies in understanding three puzzles. First, bureaucratic actions are the locus of governmental power. What are the characteristics of bureaucracy that have made it an instrument so widely respected (and sometimes feared)? Second, much of the work of bureaucracy occurs through the coordination of complex activities. How does that coordination occur? Third, such power is important for democratic government, both to protect it from forces that seek to destroy it and to empower it to do what the people want done. But how can the bureaucracy be strong enough to do its work without becoming so strong that it threatens the very system it is supposed to support? Government, let alone modern twenty-first century government, is impossible without bureaucracies, but its very existence poses a fundamental dilemma that lies at the very heart of democracy.

1 Power

The power of the state is only as strong as its ability to translate its ideas into actions. Most decisions, after all, are not self-executing. God might have said, "Let there be light," but no leader since has been able to make anything complicated happen simply by speaking it. Medieval kings knew they could not rule without armies to back them up. Without sufficient power, their serfs and vassals could rise up, their neighbors could invade, and their reigns would end. The first need of a state is security; security demands, at a minimum, defensive force; and such a force embodies power.

The power of the state, of course, stretches far beyond the military. Rulers must pay for the military, which demands that government have a system of taxes. People who are secure then aspire for more. They demand better roads, improved transportation, safe water, and protection from threats like crime and fire. They want richer lives through education and libraries. They seek a cleaner environment, good health care, and security in old age. They try to do good things for others, like providing safe homes for orphans and strategies for helping the poor escape poverty. Each of these ambitions, in turn, requires its own bureaucracy, from transportation and police departments to welfare and social security agencies. And those bureaucracies further increase government's power.
"Bureaucracy" often conveys a negative connotation; "bureaucratic" is a pejorative condemnation. All too often, the clumsy or unresponsive actions of bureaucracies give grounds for just such a negative image. But two things are important. First, throughout thousands of years, governments have yet to discover any better instrument that empowers them to do what they need to do. Government without powerful bureaucracies is no government at all (Goodsell 2004). Second, the pathologies of bureaucracy, of which there are many, are not solely the province of public bureaucracies. They apply to private bureaucracies as well, from large corporations to small-scale operations. They are inherent in the effort to organize groups of people to do hard, complex things.

Bureaucratic power is not simply a matter of the power of bureaucracies. It is also a matter of power within bureaucracies. In any complex job, the leader at the top cannot possibly prescribe the actions of everyone responsible for carrying it out. No military commander can possibly hope to dictate the actions of each fighting man and, in fact, any effort to do so would make it impossible for the commander to command with any sense of strategy. In a large organization, despite the vast potential of snooping technology like systems that track the keystrokes workers make on their keyboards, top officials can never control the actions of every worker in every cubicule. In many government organizations, like schools and police departments, front-line bureaucrats often work alone, without direct supervision. These "street-level bureaucrats," as Michael Lipsky (1980) has called them, exercise enormous power, because they carry the authority of the state but the state cannot directly oversee how they use that power.

The flow of power in a bureaucracy involves two related notions. First, because top decision-makers cannot possibly oversee everything, they must delegate power to lower-level officials. It is a paradox of bureaucratic power that top officials can acquire it only by giving it up, but attacking any complex problem demands that top-level officials trust those at lower-levels with the details. Second, in deciding how to deal with those details, individual bureaucrats have power because they have discretion in how they do their jobs. Police officers can choose whether or not to pull over a driver going 62 miles per hour in a 55 mph zone. Teachers can decide whether or not to send a child to the principal’s office. Firefighters can decide whether they need to break windows or pull down walls to fight a blaze, and prison guards can determine if an inmate needs discipline for an offense behind bars. A major issue for managing bureaucracies, therefore, is ensuring compliance, with bureaucrats exercising their discretion in ways that are consistent with the organization’s mission (Etzioni 1961; Gouldner 1967).

Public bureaucracies have power because they are the instruments of the policies of the state. Individual bureaucrats have power because they decide how those instruments are used. Indeed, the real meaning of "policy" comes only through bureaucratic action. Regardless of what top officials decide, their decisions have meaning only in how bureaucrats administer. Most drivers assume that they can safely violate the officially posted speed limit because they know that police officers are highly unlikely to stop them for driving slightly faster than the official limit. The "real" speed limit is determined by the enforcement decisions of the police.

Thus, to a powerful degree, bureaucratic power depends on decisions. Indeed, Herbert Simon (1976, 1; compare Barnard 1938) contended that "a theory of administration should be concerned with the processes of decision as well as with the processes of action." Simon argued:

The task of "deciding" pervades the entire administrative organization quite as much as does the task of "doing"—indeed, it is integrally tied up with the latter. A general theory of organization that will insure correct decision-making must include principles of organization that will include correct decision-making, just as it must include principles that will insure effective action.

Understanding—and controlling—those decisions depends on information. But that, in turn, helps identify bureaucratic pathologies. Formal theorists from within economics agreed that information is essential and that information asymmetries plague relationships within bureaucracies. They imagined bureaucracy as a series of contracts between principals (the higher-level official charged with responsibility for a policy) and agents (the lower-level official charged with carrying it out). Principals hire agents to do the bureaucracy’s job; agents agree to do it in return for compensation. Such relationships cascade through bureaucracies, from top to bottom. They tend to produce two pathologies. First, principals need to pick good agents, but they can never know enough about the agent to make sure they have made the right choices. Theorists call this "adverse selection," and poorly chosen agents may not have the ability—or the inclination—to carry out a policy as the principal wants. Second, principals can never know enough about what the agent does to ensure that the agent carries out the terms of the contract. Theorists call this "moral hazard," and the problem makes it hard to provide adequate supervision: to detect and correct problems in getting the bureaucracy's work done (Coase 1937; Williamson 1975; Wood and Waterman 1991).

The task of making decisions, however, depends heavily on the bureaucrat’s position within the bureaucracy.1 As former US federal administrator Rufus Miles (1978) famously put it, "Where you stand depends on where you sit." Indeed, Michel Crozier’s powerful analysis, The Bureaucratic Phenomenon (1964), concludes that bureaucratic institutions must be understood in terms of the cultural context within which they work. Within bureaucracies, officials at different

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1 More generally, there is a rich tradition within political science of treating "bureaucracy" as a political actor, and as an institution composed of political actors. In addition to Wilson 1960, see Allison 1969, 1971; Derthick 1971; Halperin 1974; Pressman and Wildavsky 1975; Bardach 1977; and Hogwood and Peters 1985. There is also an emerging tradition that traces the roots of bureaucratic behavior to its historical development. See, in particular, Skocpol 1982; Carpenter 2001; and Orren and Skowronek 2004.
levels tend to have different cultures: they think differently, they process information differently, they decide differently. At top levels, James Q. Wilson found (1989), operators work at the front lines on the organization's basic tasks. Managers work in the middle to organize resources, while executives manage the organization's external relations, including political support. The fact that officials at different levels of the organization focus on different kinds of problems also means that some information gets filtered out as it moves up the chain of command. Investigators of the space shuttle Challenger accident in 1986, for example, found that warnings about the risk of launching the shuttle in cold weather, which prevented rubber seals from containing the flow of super-hot gases, were blocked by managers and never reached the programme's executives. That information pathology led to the destruction of the shuttle and a searching examination of the flaws in NASA's culture, which helped lead to the accident (see Vaughn 1997; Khademian 2002). Bureaucracies thus need to be understood as collections of individual workers, as groups of people with shared identity; and as collective actors that, in turn, interact with other organizations (Blau and Scott 1962).

Thus, public bureaucracies have power because they are the instruments of state power. Individual bureaucrats have power because they have discretion over how to exercise those instruments of power. Bureaucracy can therefore be understood as a system of cascading decisions, plagued by problems of information. Empowering and controlling bureaucracies is a problem of managing those decisions and the information about them.

2 Coordination

Performing complex jobs requires a high degree of coordination—the ability to link related tasks efficiently and effectively into concerted action. In the silent film era, the "Keystone Cops" popularized a vision of what coordination does not look like—uniformed officers dizzily scurrying in all directions, getting in each other's way and providing more comedy than action. On the other hand, the work of firefighters when they arrive on the scene of a blaze is a carefully choreographed ballet, with each firefighter assigned a specific task, from searching for possible victims to coupling hoses. Coordination is a twin-headed task: making sure that what needs to get done is done (that no problem slips through the cracks) and ensuring that this is done efficiently (that the bureaucracy does not waste resources in having different people doing the same thing).

There are several approaches to coordination within organizations, as sociologist Max Weber pointed out (Gerth and Mills 1958; Weber 1964). Charismatic leaders can inspire their followers to act, but that works only as long as does the charismatic leader and it works poorly for complex problems. Indeed, the New Testament records that the disciples of Jesus, soon after he ascended into heaven, faced the dilemma of how to carry on the work. Without the charismatic leadership of Jesus, they decided they needed a more formal structure. A second option is tradition, but tradition works poorly in incorporating new people into the organization (since new members need to learn the age-old rules of the game) and for new problems (since old ways often fail to solve new puzzles). A third option is bureaucracy. Though it has legions of detractors, no better lasting alternative has ever emerged.

Bureaucracies, Weber explains, tend to have basic characteristics, which he calls the "ideal types" (not in the sense of "best" but, rather, "typical"):  
- A mission defined by top officials.  
- Fixed jurisdictions within the organization, with the scope of work defined by rules.  
- Authority graded from top to bottom, with higher-level officials having more authority than those at the bottom.  
- Management by written documents, which create an institutional record of work.  
- Management by career experts, who embody the organization's capacity to do work.  
- Management by rules, which govern the discretion exercised by administrators.

At the core, bureaucracies tend to be characterized by layers of workers structured hierarchically, with supervision through authority. The structure follows the tasks to be completed. Top officials decide how to allocate the work down the chain of command (hence the term "command structure"). Higher-level officials supervise lower-level workers. Work is understood as a contract: the worker's agreement to accept the higher-level official's authority and director over work in exchange for compensation.

This approach to hierarchical authority promotes coordination. Supervisors can assess the work to be done. They can organize the bureaucracy according to the work, fill each position with individuals best trained for each task, and issue orders as needed to ensure the work is done. Bureaucracies exist to perform complex tasks; hierarchical authority makes that possible by providing the mechanism for coordination. Bureaucracies can be "tall," with many layers, or "flat," with relatively little distance from top to bottom. Officials can supervise a relatively large number of workers (what is called the "span of control") or relatively few. They can use their authority like an iron fist or grant subordinates wide discretion. There is
Public bureaucracies have these characteristics, plus several others (Seidman 1998). Indeed, Wallace Sayre (1928, 245) once commented that "business and public administration are alike only in all unimportant respects." First, unlike private bureaucracies, in which top officials can define their own missions (which cars to build, for example, or which movies to make), top officials in public bureaucracies have their missions defined by elected policy-makers. Second, not only must public administrators do what the law says; they can do only what the law says. For example, public administrators cannot spend money in any way not specified in appropriations or provide any service not authorized in law. That is why the federal government faces periodic shutdown crises: if the authority to spend money expires, all but essential government employees must turn out the lights and go home. Third, public administrators tend to work under civil service rules, which grew out of an effort in the late nineteenth century to eliminate political patronage in the hiring of public employees. By law, public administrators are supposed to demonstrate neutral competence: efficient administration of the law, without regard to political favoritism. Finally, public administrators must pay great attention to the standards by which they do their work. Laws require equal treatment and forbid discrimination. There are standards for financial record keeping and due process.

Not all coordination is formal or hierarchical, as Charles E. Lindblom contended (1959, 1977; Dahl and Lindblom 1953). In his famous argument about incrementalism, Lindblom contended that partisan mutual adjustment, a bargaining process among players in a system, can produce efficient outcomes without subjecting the system to the high costs and difficulty of trying to align everyone's behavior through central direction. Just as pluralism was becoming the dominant model for understanding how competing political forces bargain out their differences, Lindblom applied the same approach to decision-making within organizations and, in the process, introduced an important challenge to orthodox bureaucracy. Instead of an approach in which authority and formal structure dominated, Lindblom explained how bargaining and informal relationships could edge out orthodoxy and, he claimed, produce decisions that were both more efficient and more responsive to the wishes of the public.

All of these issues, of course, go to the heart of the role of bureaucracy in a democracy. But they also help reinforce the sometime sense of "bureaucracy" as a dirty word. The bureaucratic form of organization carries with it several well-known pathologies. Organizational rules can create powerful incentives to follow them for their own sake—a phenomenon that became known as "red tape" after the red ribbons once used to tie up the box of official papers presented to the king (Kauffman 1977). (In the United States, similar red ribbons were used to tie up the records of Civil War veterans, and "cutting the red tape" was an effort to shortcut the rules in making required payments to them.) An emphasis on procedures can limit an organization's responsiveness to those it is supposed to serve. The exercise of authority can make it difficult for workers to use their professional judgment in dealing with problems that might not fit the standard rubric. Once set, organizational structure can be hard to change.

All in all, bureaucratic pathologies are numerous and serious. And they echo Winston Churchill's famous comment, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried." For thousands of years, people have chafed under the burdens of "bureaucracy," and for thousands of years, reformers have sought alternatives. The bureaucratic form of organization has endured because society has yet to discover anything that works better in coordinating complex action.

As both the ambitions and the tools of government became more complex, government came to rely more on networks of service providers, involving both different levels of government and partners outside government, in nongovernmental organizations and private contractors (Goldsmith and Eggers 2002). In the United Kingdom, the government embraced the "joined-up government" initiative, focused on improving the coordination of services across government agencies. Australia adopted a "whole-of-government" approach, while some American governments pursued a "no-wrong-door" strategy (in which managers used information technology to help people solve their problems, however they entered government's domain, instead of sending them to a series of offices by claiming that other agencies were responsible for solving the problem) (see 6, P. et al. 2002). Coordination rose to a puzzle of far greater importance, as fewer government agencies could fully control the organizational resources they needed to meet their mission—and as the search for effective administration demanded stronger, more effective partnerships for service delivery. Indeed, one of the most important budding challenges of twenty-first-century bureaucracy is adapting traditional hierarchical bureaucracy to manage such multiorganizational networks.

3 Accountability

Bureaucracy is a generic form of organization, not one limited to the public sector. (Public utilities and cellular phone companies are typically private organizations, and grievances about their bureaucracies rival the worst complaints about public organizations.) Public bureaucracies must solve an additional problem. Their task is not only to perform the work for which they were created. In a democracy, they must do so in a way that is accountable to elected policy-makers and, ultimately, to
the people who elect them. The challenge is empowering them enough to do their jobs while restraining their power to prevent abuse (Albrow 1970; Behn 2001).

There are several approaches to accountability. One is based on Weber's rational-legal approach to bureaucratic power. Elected officials delegate power to bureaucrats. Bureaucrats have only the power delegated to them, through the chain of command. Thus, the nature of the law and the structure of the bureaucracy shape bureaucratic accountability.

A second approach views democracy and efficiency as conflicting values (Okun 1975). Governments often seek broad discussion and debate to frame policy. They seek streamlined and efficient administration of that policy. The steps taken to agree on what accountability is and how it ought to work, however, is often deceptively difficult. The fragmentation of bureaucracy tends to aggravate this problem, moreover.

A third approach pursues a market-based strategy, built on the principal-agent model described above. Administrators have important resources that policymakers need, including information about their programs and the capacity to act. Policy-makers have resources, including authority, money, and support, that administrators need if they are to do their job. Accountability, in this approach, is seen as an exchange relationship, in which each side bargains its needs and resources with the other.

These multiple approaches underline an important feature of accountability. Everyone wants it, and everyone thinks they know what they want. Getting agreement on what accountability is and how it ought to work, however, is often deceptively difficult. The fragmentation of bureaucracy tends to aggravate this problem, moreover. "Bureaucracy," after all, is not just one entity but many, each with its own and often conflicting jurisdictions and missions. There are multiple layers within each bureaucracy and external control agencies, including budget and personnel offices, exercise leverage over elements of bureaucratic action. The central imperative of public bureaucracy is that its substantial power must remain under the control of policy-makers. Determining how best to do so, however, is fraught with complexity and contradiction.

4 Challenges

That frames the fundamental dilemma of public bureaucracies: being powerful enough to do the job (for who would want to waste money on a bureaucracy that did not perform?) yet not so powerful as to threaten the sovereignty of elected officials (for who in a democracy would want to surrender their autonomy to overbearing bureaucrats?). This is certainly not a new problem, of course. Medieval serfs put up with overbearing nobles because they protected them when marauders raided, and the Roman Emperor Caligula was killed by his own Praetorian guard because they did not like where he was taking the empire. As government has grown larger and more complex, keeping powerful bureaucracy at heel has become even more important—and difficult.

For modern public bureaucracies, however, new challenges have grown atop the traditional ones. Bureaucracies tend to be best at routine matters, such as dispatching emergency workers to accident scenes and processing tax returns. After all, the building blocks of bureaucracy are building capacity and devising standard routines to manage complex but predictable problems. They tend to be far less effective on problems that fall outside of the normal routine, and modern society offers a host of such issues, from homeland security to environmental management. Bureaucracies remain the core of government action. They are the repositories of expertise, but equipping them to deal flexibly with new and rapidly evolving policy problems is a major issue.

So, too, is the challenge of managing the complex collection of organizations—public, private, and nonprofit—on which government increasingly relies for implementing public services. Much public administration occurs through contracts with for-profit and nonprofit organizations, grants to other governments and nonprofit organizations, regulations, special tax preferences, loan programs, and other indirect tools of government action (Salamon with Elliott, 2002). Managing these tools sometimes is harder than managing directly administered government programs but, more important, managing them is different. Government cannot rely on authority and hierarchy to manage programs outside the bureaucracy. Instead, public administrators must rely on a host of other tools, from negotiated contracts to incentives. This in turn offers skills that are often in short supply, as NASA discovered in managing its space shuttle program and the US Department of Defense found in many weapons procurement projects. As a result, programs administered through such indirect tools have often developed serious problems.

These puzzles have, in turn, led to a new approach to bureaucracy, founded on interorganizational networks instead of hierarchies. It is an approach that focuses primarily on the relationships between organizations instead of within them. As Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers (2004, 7) argue:

The traditional hierarchical model of government simply does not meet the demands of this complex, rapidly changing age. Rigid bureaucratic systems that operate with command-and-control procedures, narrow work restrictions, and inward-looking cultures and operational models are particularly ill-suited to addressing problems that often transcend organizational boundaries.

Instead, as Lester Salamon puts it, "a dense mosaic" of policy approaches, full of "complex, interdependent relationships with a host of third-party providers," increasingly characterizes much government action (Salamon 2002, 3). In fact, the federal government spends very little of its money on programs its bureaucrats
5 The Impulse for Reform

Americans had periodically reformed their bureaucracies for more than a century, in a series of changes that Paul Light (1997) has called the "tides of reform." By the 1980s and 1990s, reform had become a truly global phenomenon. Governments everywhere, of widely different sizes, faced remarkably similar complaints from their citizens about government's size and ineffectiveness, and those complaints launched a global revolution in public management reform (Kettl 2005). The puzzle: how to make government smaller, more effective, and more responsive. The diagnosis centered on the pathologies of bureaucracy. The solutions varied widely.

5.1 The New Public Management

The major initiative was a movement, first launched in New Zealand and quickly followed in the United Kingdom, called "the new public management." Reformers complained that the traditional bureaucratic approach rendered public organizations unresponsive to citizens and wasteful of public money. The problem, they contended, was that these bureaucracies became locked into their own internal games and had no incentive to improve. In contrast, markets created strong incentives for efficiency and responsiveness. Organizations that successfully competed in the market grew and prospered; those that did not failed and folded. The reformers drew heavily on the path-breaking article by Ronald Coase (1937), writings by Oliver Williamson (1975), and the theories developed by the Chicago School of economics. (Their reliance on that work was clear and direct—public officials in New Zealand's capital, Wellington, could be heard quoting from the writings of relatively abstract economists.) That work argued that the relationships between principals and agents structured the key relationships in public bureaucracies, that government bureaucracies tended to stumble into the worst pathologies affecting the principal-agent relationship, and that by inserting market-like incentives into that relationship government could vastly improve its performance.

They began by arguing government should shed as many functions as it could to the private sector. New Zealand and the United Kingdom sold off large state-owned enterprises, including telephone, oil, insurance, post office, and airline companies. In New Zealand, the government sold off more than twenty state-owned companies. More fundamentally, the government came to view all activities as market transactions. It owned the service, and its goal was to provide the maximum return for taxpayers.

To do so, the New Zealanders aggressively pursued several reforms. One was strategic planning. The government defined its basic goals and constructed its budget to finance them. In addition, New Zealand was the world's first nation to adopt accrual accounting, which required the government to account for the full cost of a program when it was created. (In the American system—and in the system of most governments—the budget accounts for the annual cost of the program. That often creates a strong incentive for making short-term investments now that carry large long-term—but unbudgeted—costs that cause serious problems in future budgets.)

Another feature was transparency, based on a separation of the purchase and production functions. The government set policy by deciding what ought to be done. It would then rely on whoever could do the job most effectively and cheaply, whether within the government or on the outside. Unlike the American privatization movement, there was no presumption that private production was better. The goal was to give the job to whoever could do it best. For government-produced services, the government hired chief executives with fixed-term contracts and performance incentives. They had broad authority and flexibility in producing the programs. The government then negotiated production contracts with the suppliers, including with government agencies and their chief executives. The contracts specified outputs—from the miles of roadway to be built or the
number of individuals to receive job training—and held the chief executive responsible for delivering those outputs.

In short, the reformers tried to draw a sharp line between policy-making and policy administration. Elected officials remained responsible for policy-making; the reformers sought to replace traditional authority-driven government bureaucracy with market-driven competition. Their goal was to shrink the size of government and improve the way it worked. The ultimate measure of accountability became results.

The New Zealand reforms sparked a global revolution that swept through the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and other nations to a lesser degree. It generated an enormous and wide-ranging debate (Aucoin 1996; Barzelay 2001; Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh 1996; Hood 1984, 1998; Kettl 2003). Reformers around the world hailed the approach as an imaginative and innovative strategy to improve the performance of government and to excise the pathologies of government bureaucracy. The strategy had dual power, in part because of the long intellectual tradition from which it grew and in part because it offered commonsense solutions to the problems of bureaucracy that nagged many governments. The reforms predictably did not solve all of bureaucracy's problems. Creating and sustaining markets proved difficult. Moreover, output measures—the activity surrounding government programs—did not address the more important political issue—what impact these programs had. Over time, the reforms moved more toward the assessment of impacts, but the deeper they got into these issues, the more difficult the problems became (Schick 1996).

Finally, the reforms could not resolve the core political issues that inevitably surround the delivery of services. The effort to separate policy from administration could not remove the political implications from administrative acts. Government bureaucracies inevitably deal with issues that are intricately interconnected with the politics of government. Nevertheless, the reforms—especially their strong emphasis on measuring results—had an enormous impact on government bureaucracies around the world (Pollitt 1990; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000).

5.2 American Reform

The United States launched its own government reform movement, but the movement came fifteen years later than in New Zealand and it followed a very different strategy. Americans, of course, had long had a strong instinct for reform. But in 1993, following Bill Clinton's narrow victory over the senior George Bush, the Clinton administration launched a broad reform effort. Clearly worried by the strong third-party candidacy of H. Ross Perot, who won 19 percent of the electoral vote by arguing big deficits and poor performance were plaguing American government, Clinton decided to launch a broad initiative to address Perot's critique—and to reduce the chances Perot's effort might grow and undermine Clinton's campaign for a second term. He seized on a strategy outlined by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992), an author and a city manager, to "reinvent government." He then put Vice President Al Gore in charge of the project and Gore, in turn, put hundreds of federal employees to work on a six-month effort to develop money-saving ideas throughout government. Their report listed 384 recommendations, promised $108 billion in savings, and pledged to shrink the federal workforce by 12 percent within five years. Gore promised (1993) nothing less than "creating a government that works better and costs less" (compare Kettl 1998).

On the "works better" side, Gore developed tactics for sweeping away barriers that, he said, prevented government employees from doing their jobs effectively. He made the case for eliminating obsolete structures, ancient processes, and poor leadership, while replacing them with employees empowered with the authority to do their jobs as their experience told them was the best approach. The plan was to replace top-down, rule-driven government with a bottom-up, customer-driven approach to service delivery. On the "costs less" side, Gore proposed to eliminate obsolete programs, trim extra layers of management and make the bureaucracy flatter, and reduce the number of government employees.

The reinventing government effort, however, quickly ran afoul of the Republicans own effort, the "Contract with America," which sought a far smaller and more privatized government. Gore quickly had to push back the "works better" initiatives to concentrate on the "costs less" side, especially the reduction in government employment, which the administration ratcheted up to 273,000 employees. There was little strategic thinking behind the downsizing. The reductions left some agencies with a serious mismatch between the skills of employees and the requirements of agency missions. But although the downsizing was haphazard, the administration did indeed hit its target, through an aggressive program of early retirement bonuses.

Gore became closely identified with the effort, but he got little political credit for it. He barely mentioned "reinventing government" during his failed 2000 presidential campaign. Nevertheless, the Clinton administration did indeed leave behind a smaller government, at least when measured by the number of government employees, as well as significant improvements in electronic government and procurement. Despite its political roots, however, the reinvention campaign produced little political impact.

Soon after he became president, however, George W. Bush launched his own five-point management improvement initiative. He sought to improve the strategic
management of human capital, the capacity of government employees to do their jobs; to increase the contracting out of public services; to improve financial management; to expand electronic government; and to integrate performance measures for government programs into budget decisions. Like the New Zealand reforms, the effort had a heavy results-based flavor and sought to couple the measurement of results with budgetary decisions. But Bush pushed the USA past the New Zealand reforms by focusing squarely on outcomes, the impact that government programs had. On one level, these were the questions that drove politics. If teachers teach, do children learn? If job training programs educate workers, do they acquire useful long-term skills that help them get and keep good jobs? Of course, measuring outcomes proved extraordinarily difficult. Getting policy-makers to pay attention to the measures was a challenge as well. But introducing the measurement of results into the process proved a significant accomplishment of the Bush administration. And it underlined the broader theme of government reform around the world: the central role that measurement of results has come to play in the effort to improve the bureaucracies.

6 Conclusion

Public bureaucracy is thus the focus of enduring paradoxes. "Bureaucratic" suggests behavior everyone hates, yet bureaucracy is an inescapable part of government. Without it, little of what we value in government would be possible. Bureaucracy is thus a major center of government power, but critics constantly seek to restrain that power. Bureaucracy is structured to maximize its ability to perform routine tasks, yet more of its work occurs through indirect tools and networks that challenge bureaucracy's basic function and structure. No part of government has seen as much fundamental reform over the last generation, yet despite all the changes the core features of bureaucracy have proved surprisingly enduring.

Some of this is because of bureaucracy's central position in government. As both symbol and instrument of government power, the fundamental conflicts over what government is and what it ought to do become stuck to it. Some of this is because what citizens expect from government—and how much they are willing to pay to get it—is in the midst of a fundamental reassessment, and bureaucracy is caught in the crossfire. Bureaucracy is an enduring part of government because there can be no effective government without it. Its place within democratic government is inevitably full of contradictions because of the way citizens view government.

On one hand, bureaucracy is one element of government that, it can be said with certainty, will endure through the ages, just as it always has. On the other hand, efforts to change and reform bureaucracy will endure, just as certainly, because of the inherent conflicts it embodies. Thus, the paradox of permanence and change is the defining reality of public bureaucracy.

The paradox revolves around bureaucracy's central questions: empowering bureaucracy enough to be effective without making bureaucracy so powerful as to threaten democratic rule; using hierarchy to coordinate programs without making bureaucracy inflexible; and securing accountability of bureaucracy to elected officials (and ultimately to the public) without rendering it incapable of effective action. The long tradition of theory about public bureaucracies has sought to manage these paradoxes by drawing boundaries: boundaries that constrain power, promote coordination, and seek accountability. But the inescapable reality of twenty-first-century government is that the very boundaries that have been created over time to manage the paradoxes have, in turn, often crippled government in addressing the most important public policy issues. For example, in addressing the tough puzzles surrounding the 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control's Julie Gerberding found that her bureaucracy hindered, not helped her effort to devise an effective response. In case after case, from the outbreak of anthrax to SARS to monkey pox, Gerberding discovered that she needed to devise new organizational strategies to deal with inescapable problems. Indeed, she found a "global-to-local and local-to-global connectivity" that "truly exemplifies the 'small world,'" one where the old boundaries often did not fit (2005, 2).

For both international organizations and developing countries, these issues are especially sharp. Developing countries are struggling to accelerate their pace of economic transformation, so they can satisfy the aspirations of their citizens. Doing so, however, requires the creation of strong private markets and robust public bureaucracies to regulate and control them. Trying to fuel development without first building adequate public institutions, or trying to wire out corruption without creating the preconditions for effective administrative performance, can lead to enormous problems, Allen Schick (1998) persuasively argues. For international organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which are seeking to support the growth of developing nations, the challenge is doubled. They not only have to find ways of solving this dilemma, but they also have to reform their own operations to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving world economy. Otherwise, they risk increasing the already large gap between the world's richer and poorer nations.

The management of public programs increasingly spills beyond public bureaucracies, a phenomenon that students of bureaucracy have come to call "governance" (Pierre and Peters 2000; Peters 2000; Kettl 2002). As was the case with Gerberding's puzzles, many of the most important problems that government faces—and, indeed, many of the strategies government follows in attacking many
programs—spill over the boundaries of the government bureaucracies created to manage them. Where the problems strain the boundaries, they also strain the theories created to guide the hands of bureaucrats. Network approaches to government have arisen to manage these tough, boundary-spanning problems. But these approaches have grown faster than the theories to guide them. The theories of government bureaucracy find themselves challenged to devise new arguments to the ageless puzzles of bureaucratic power, coordination, and accountability. Bureaucracies enough to attack these tough problems while avoiding the trap of safeguarding its basic principles while experimenting with new approaches, which demand government's best efforts. Governments are struggling with empowering guide and control bureaucracy. These approaches have grown faster than the theories to guide them. The theories of might perhaps better fit society's tough problems but which pose new challenges to manage them. Where the problems strain the boundaries, they also strain the precepts. That leaves practitioners and theorists alike with the twin task of governance. However, the problems facing governments increasingly strain its BEHN, R. D. REFORM AGENDA. Houndmills: Palgrave.

REFERENCES


