

Managing Bureaucracy

Government cannot exist without some form of bureaucracy. In his essay, *The Study of Administration*, Woodrow Wilson claimed that self-government does not mean having a hand in everything (Wilson, 1887). It has been the error of our country to at times attempt to do too much by way of a vote. Democratic values are to be taken into account by the government, but pure democracy has the tendency to bring decision making to a halt. Wilson saw the end goal to be creating a system that could address public interests while not complicating the role of government (1887). The role of bureaucracy is to step in and manage society in place of the government. Wilson saw administrators as more than just passive instruments (1887). Bureaucrats and administrators are to be active change agents who carry out the programs of government in accordance with the will of the people. Even the street-level bureaucrat, as Michael Lipsky describes, has a wide range of discretion when carrying out his or her role (1980, p. 15). Government rules, regulations, and policies are often too complex for a street-level bureaucrat to follow at all times (Lipsky, 1980, p. 15). The bureaucrats and administrators who interact with the people are capable of implementing programs that have an impact on society.

Strategies of the Bureaucracy

How a bureaucratic agency implements a program is essential to the effectiveness of that program. Of the many forms and models of planning mentioned by Grover Starling, strategic planning encompasses attributes of all the other forms. Rational decision-making is a recurring theme in the bureaucratic process. Strategic management is a conscious and rational decision-

making process that an organization uses to implement its goals (Starling, 2011, p. 232). With strategic management, the organization also makes adjustments as conditions surrounding the implementation process change. The ability to adapt to new variables and situations gives strategic management flexibility in public management.

Implementing a program is a complex process. The process is better directed when the organization in charge has a clear mission statement (Starling, 2011, p. 233). Before any planning can occur, the organization must create clear and decisive goals that cannot be easily challenged by the public and other agencies. The goals must also at the same time be open to flexibility once the actual planning and implementation stages of the process are underway. Often times, the federal government hands down ambiguous instructions to the bureaucracy and it is then up to public administrators to exercise discretion when establishing goals. A representative bureaucracy will take into account the input of their stakeholders (Starling, 2011, p. 234). Stakeholders, who are made up of the public, play a decisive role in whether a program will succeed or fail (Starling, 2011, p.233).

Effective Democracy

Effective democracy consists of a bureaucracy that is representative of the public. Robert Dahl includes associational autonomy among his components for democracy (Dahl, 2000). Agencies operate with a certain degree of autonomy when implementing programs. Autonomy allows the agency to adapt to both internal and external changes in the process at any time. Dahl also highlights another key component of democracy – *control of the agenda* (Dahl, 2000). Agenda setting is a part of any organization, public or private. A framework of the agenda is necessary before starting any planning or implementation. Bureaucracies are responsible for

setting agendas that are in line with both the government and the people. Woodrow Wilson acknowledged the fact that it is much harder to run a constitution than to frame one (1887). In the same way, it is much harder to carry out a program than to frame one. The framework and agenda of a program is crucial in getting the process started, but the complexities arise during the implementation process.

According to Grover Starling, “implementation is a process that can be managed” (2011, p. 285). How the process is managed determines the validity and effectiveness of the program in question. Strategies that bureaucracies use include privatization, partnerships, and contracting. The most significant advantage to these bureaucratic strategies is that they free the bureaucracy up to focus on other issues. If the bureaucracy can effectively delegate a responsibility through a partnership, then they are able to work on other parts of the process or even address other public needs. The public is constantly calling for greater efficiency in government, and strategies like these can help accomplish that goal.

Social Action meets Social Values

Beginning with Woodrow Wilson’s establishment of the politics-administration dichotomy, there have been many debates on various dichotomies relating to public administration. Frank Fischer discusses the dichotomy of social action and social values (1995, p. 15). Some theorists strive to separate facts and values when it comes to bureaucratic decision-making. The most appropriate technique however would be one mixing both facts and values to better understand human behavior (Fischer, 1995, p.15). The bureaucracy should not only represent its public demographically, but it should also represent the values of its public. While implementing any social program, bureaucrats and administrators have to consider the values of

society at large. Programs can have a lasting impact on the community and bureaucrats are charged with finding the balance between maintaining social values and introducing new ones.

The method an organization employs while implementing a program is central to their mission statement. The public wants to see the method as a reflection of what is to come. Planning a program ought to be done in a way that reflects the goals of the program and the agency. A bureaucracy has to handle the planning process with care so as to consider the interests of all stakeholders. Fischer describes a framework that he calls practical deliberation (1995, p. 17). Practical deliberation integrates the empirical and normative approaches to an issue. It is a middle ground that allows for factual data and societal ideals to coexist. No matter the policy or program, practical deliberation is a way to address all of the factors at play in any given process. Attention cannot only be given to just the empirical or just the normative qualities of situation. Social programs are too important to society to *not* examine all aspects of the scenario.

Conclusion

Bureaucracy exists in order to fulfill the functions of government. In his late 1880s essay, Woodrow Wilson described how complex government was becoming. Contemporary society is even more complex than when Wilson was writing about the subject. Because we have created an expansive bureaucracy, we grant certain amounts of discretion to our public professionals. They in turn are expected to exercise their discretion in a way that reflects the public interest and public good. Any given situation or program can require flexibility. There is sometimes the tendency to favor procedure over purpose when it comes to policymaking and program

implementation. Public administrators cannot let technicalities get in the way of carrying out an effective program that will benefit the public.

Works Cited

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