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## Bureaucrats Versus Service Providers: Personnel in the Public Sector

In the study of public administration, organizations, or even government as a whole, are often anthropomorphized. Newspapers, media personalities, and even scholars, will talk about the ‘Ministry of X making a decision’, or say that ‘the government undertook a new policy initiative’. That language is a convenient way to cope with the complexities of decision-making in the public sector, but ignores the important reality that it is individuals, or groups of individuals, who are making those decisions. To understand government, and the public bureaucracy within government, we need to understand the people who work in government. In particular, we need to understand how public employees define their jobs as parts of governing, and why they have chosen to work in the public sector.

We also need to understand that although public employees are often denigrated as ‘shirkers’ (Brehm and Gates, 1997) and as incompetent, or alternatively as power-mad empire builders, they are generally no more or less competent, or motivated, than their counterparts in the private sector. Unlike their counterparts in the private sector, however, they often express a strong desire for public service and seek opportunities to use their talents for developing and administering public services. Rather than being shirkers, many are highly motivated and find themselves frustrated by the structure and the rules of the ‘bureaucracy’ within which they perform their tasks.

### **People as The Actors in Public Administration**

Public employees are the primary actors in governing. The public sector employs a wide range of actors to deliver its services and to help make public policy.

The upper echelons of public organizations are generally populated by individuals with university education and with substantial levels of experience, increasingly in both the public and private sectors. There are also numerous professionals – doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, etc. – who work within government. And at the lower levels of government a number of white-collar (clerks, data technicians) and blue-collar (bus drivers, sanitation workers) employees provide essential services.

Although we talk rather easily about public employees, drawing the boundary of when someone is a public employee or not can be difficult. Some members of the public administration such as upper-echelon civil servants in a ministry or a school teacher in a public school are clearly part of the public sector. However, how do we count individuals who are working in a charter school, or some other type of school that is organized as a private entity but paid for by public money? And how do we count employees of defense contractors for whom government is a monopsonistic purchaser of their products? In the latter two cases, the position for the individual might not exist without the public budget but at the same time their organizations are generally considered to be in the private sector.

Several tests can be used to determine whom we should count as being a public employee. First, public employees tend to be hired and managed through a civil service system of some sort. That said, an increasing number of public employees are hired on individual contracts and are not controlled through a general set of formal rules. Second, we can determine where the funds to pay the salaries of these individuals come from, and to the extent that the money is public then perhaps they are public employees. Yet a third test is whether the actions of these individuals are controlled through instruments such as freedom of information laws and codes of ethics for the public sector.

Assuming that we can determine who is and who is not really a public employee, we need also to be careful not to assume that those public employees who are most important for both the government and society are those occupying the ‘decision-making positions’ at the top of public organizations. While those upper-echelon positions are indeed important, the people at the bottom of public organizations are also crucial actors in governing their societies. The policeman or policewoman on the beat, the school teacher, the clerk in the civil registry and all the other ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Meyers and Nielsen, 2012) play major roles for the public sector. These are difficult positions that require decision-making just as do the positions at the apex of the administrative hierarchies (Tummers et al., 2015).

In some ways, street-level bureaucrats are the most important elements of public administration (see Hupe, Hill and Buffat, 2015), at least for the average citizen. They are the elements of the state with whom the average citizen interacts on an almost daily basis, and hence the decisions made by these lower-level officials are the ones that matter for the citizens. The actions of these lower-echelon officials are controlled in part by law and rules of the organization, however, they have a good deal of discretion (Lundqvist, 1980; Hupe, 2013) and there is a huge body of evidence that they exercise that discretion as they administer programs.

As well as the substantive decisions made by the lower echelons of public administration, the manner in which they treat the citizens is also important for

shaping how citizens think of their government. Are these officials rude? Are they attentive to the needs of their clients? Do they demonstrate any empathy with the lives of ordinary citizens? The good news is that most available evidence is that citizens generally feel that they are treated at least as well by public employees as they are by the employees of large private organizations. The bad news, however, is that they tend to say that, in general, services provided by the public sector are not as good as those supplied by the private sector. Also, some interactions between the public sector and citizens the police and African-Americans for example – may be less positive.

Thus, the public sector should not be seen as being inhabited by a group of stereotypical ‘paper pushers’, but rather as being a complex set of organizations requiring a huge range of skills from an equally broad range of people. Those skills range from being a skilled surgeon in a public hospital to being a skilled sniper on a battlefield to being a janitor in a public building. What matters is that all of these public employees make their own contribution to the delivery of important public services.

To help understand how public employees do their jobs and contribute to the fulfillment of public policy goals, we are developing two alternative models of the roles of these officials. These are to some extent ideal type models of the roles that will be played by members of the public administration.<sup>1</sup> As such these two models are primarily intellectual tools to assist in understanding real-world cases, rather than descriptions of those realities.

In this chapter we will be focusing on the middle and lower levels of the public administration. We will reserve the discussion about the upper echelons of administration for Chapters (4 and 6), which cover the political and policy-making roles of administration. Some of the same dimensions of behavior discussed here are also relevant for those higher-level officials, but a number of other issues about their decision-making need to be discussed separately. This is especially so because higher-level officials rarely are involved in direct delivery of services to the public; rather they work in the center of government, making decisions about more general issues.

## **Bureaucrats as The Stereotype and as Reality**

Just as bureaucracy can be a stereotype for the structure of public administration, the individuals who inhabit those structures may be stereotyped as ‘bureaucrats’. Just as the term bureaucracy is often used as a pejorative for the structures, calling a public employee a bureaucrat is not usually intended to compliment that individual. That said, acting as a bureaucrat in the stricter denotative sense of the term does have a number of positive features that citizens

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<sup>1</sup>The original model of bureaucracy developed by Weber was an ideal type, assuming that no real world administrative system would manifest all the criteria contained in the model. The model still constitutes a useful intellectual model against which to compare real-world administrative systems.

who come into contact with those bureaucrats should appreciate. Citizens may, in fact, consider some aspects of the bureaucratic model of behavior as essential for proper public administration.

The most central aspect of bureaucratic behavior in public office is that the bureaucrat applies the law to individual cases (see Derlien, 1999). Max Weber's model of bureaucracy was developed in response to the patrimonial administration of his time and the high levels of discretion that could be exercised by public employees. In that style of administration, citizens had few if any rights vis-à-vis the administration and could not even be sure of why and how decisions were being made, or indeed if a decision was going to be made. The bureaucratic model of administration is more transparent, with defined rights and obligations, and the use of files, so that the progress of a case through the administrative process can be tracked.

The use of law and rules also meant that universalistic criteria were applied to cases. The public administrator was deemed to act *sine irae ac studio* (without anger or bias) when making decisions and to treat all citizens equally. This standard is in marked contrast to administrative systems that even in the twenty-first century may make decisions based at least in part on ethnicity, religion, gender or political affiliations of the citizen.<sup>2</sup> Again, this equal treatment through the bureaucratic model of administrative behavior is expected by citizens in democratic societies as a fundamental right of citizenship.

A third important element of the bureaucratic model of public employment is that public employment should be a career and a full-time occupation. This professional model of public employment is in contrast to the more casual approach to these positions that characterized employment at the time that Weber wrote, and which also characterizes public employment in many contemporary political systems. In fact, part of the reform of personnel systems in the vein of the New Public Management (NPM) has been to deinstitutionalize public employment and to base it more on short-term contracts rather than on a more permanent civil service system (Laegreid and Christensen, 2013).

While the bureaucratic model had, and has, several virtues it also has some real difficulties for citizens and for the state. The first is that while rules can constrain the discretion of public employees, those laws and rules can also be used to protect the public employee. If an individual civil servant is expected to follow the rules, then those rules can also become a protection for those employees. If the employee follows the rules then he or she is by definition correct, no matter what may happen to the citizen. Only when the public employee exercises his or her discretion do they risk being sanctioned.

These rules also become the foundation for the (in)famous 'red tape' in bureaucracy (Kaufman, 1977; Bozeman, 2010). Government organizations develop rules not only to clarify procedures, and perhaps to protect the rights of citizens, but also to provide some protection for the members of the

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<sup>2</sup>The behavior of Kim Davis, the county clerk of Rowan County, Kentucky, who applied her own principles in denying marriage licenses to same sex couples rather than the law is an obvious example.

organizations. If the member of the organization follows all the rules, as torturous as they may be at times, then he or she cannot be faulted as an administrator – as a bureaucrat. This means that in the view of many citizens decisions may be made slowly — but they will be made properly and legally (and safely for the individuals making the decision).

Even when all the rules are followed, however, the lower-echelon official may feel uncertain about his or her capacity to make a decision and may ‘pass the buck’ to a higher level of the officialdom.<sup>3</sup> Not making a decision is rarely threatening to an employee, whether public or private. The procedures can only specify the steps necessary to make the decision but they may not be sufficiently detailed to provide answers to all the questions that may arise. When those awkward cases arise, the decision is often transferred higher and higher within the organization.

Finally, the perhaps ultimate, and paradoxical, negative consequence of the legalism and formality inherent in the bureaucratic model is that the public sector will treat all cases as the same. While this universalism is in some ways a virtue (see above), it also can mean that government organizations appear unresponsive to their clients and to the citizenry as a whole. Citizens may not only want equality, but they may also want the special features of their own claims considered by government. Thus, responsibility to law as a virtue for government can be seen as trumping another important virtue in government – responsiveness.

## Service Providers as Another Reality

Another way to think about the role of public personnel is as service providers for the public. In this conception of their role, public employees are less bound by legal constraints and more focused on the role of being a public *servant*. The primary responsibility of the public employee in this conception of their position in governing is to ensure that citizens receive the programs and benefits they are entitled to and do so as effectively as possible. More than pushing paper in an office, this conception of the public employee is a more active one, attempting to ensure that services are delivered.

The ‘street-level bureaucrat’ is perhaps the epitome of this conception of the public employee. The extensive literature on this group of employees emphasizes their direct contacts with citizens and their capacity to make decisions about eligibility for benefits, or the granting of licenses, or whether someone is arrested or not (see Smith, 2012). That direct contact with citizens enables them to exercise some discretion about individual cases and also to provide other forms of support for their clients. Indeed, in some of the literature on street-level bureaucrats the argument has been that these officials are too solicitous toward their client and do not impose the law in ways that would benefit their other clients – the public at large as taxpayers.

The role of service providers is especially apt for professionals who work within the public sector, such as doctors, nurses, and teachers. One standard

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<sup>3</sup>The origins of this term are uncertain, but it is often associated with President Harry S. Truman, who had a sign ‘The buck stops here’ on his desk in the Oval Office.

sociological definition of a professional is that they will put the interests of their clients ahead of their own (Freidson, 1986). Thus, these professionals will tend to make decisions that advantage their clients rather than protecting the organization. That said, nonprofessional public employees may behave in the same way towards their clients. That behavior may be as simple as a bus driver stopping for a passenger who is obviously hurrying to get to the next bus stop.

While much of the literature on the service provider conception of the public servant emphasizes the positive aspects of this role for public employees, there can be a much darker side as well. In a classic study of social workers in the United States, Piven and Cloward (1993; see also Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011) argue that these employees ‘regulate the poor’ and impose rather harsh regimens on citizens seeking public assistance. Likewise, teachers may use their discretion to differentially punish students of color, and males more than females. And the police in any number of societies are accused of using excessive force in making arrests. The list might go on but if public employees are not to be bound closely by law or other means of enforcing accountability, there is the danger that the discretion will be abused (see Lipsky, 1980, on coping behavior).

This exercise of discretion raises a more general point that universalistic standards for treatment of citizens may not be applied to all citizens, and that some individuals may be advantaged and others disadvantaged by the discretion. Citizens always want themselves to be treated specially and to have all the details of their case considered carefully, while they may be happy to have everyone else treated in a legalistic, bureaucratic manner. The more personal style of providing services to the public may enhance the feelings of efficacy among some citizens but risks undermining uniformity for all citizens. The loss of uniformity and the increase in discretion may therefore provide distinct advantages for some segments of the population but not for others.

## **Finding a Balance Between Responsibility and Responsiveness**

The two ideal type models of public employees developed above are both valuable ways of thinking about the role of public sector personnel, and some aspects of both also are found in the real world of government. The question is not necessarily choosing one or the other but rather finding some balance between the two. As already noted, both of these approaches to public personnel not only have important virtues, but they both also have significant deficiencies. Therefore, the task for designers of public programs and for managers within the public sector is to find the appropriate mix of attributes in order to be effective in governing. These two models can also be seen as representing two alternative approaches to the accountability of public administration. On the one hand, the bureaucratic model emphasizes accountability through legal responsibility. On the other hand, the service delivery model emphasizes accountability through responsibility to the clients of the programs.

The political and administrative culture of a country will influence the appropriate mix of bureaucratic and service delivery orientations in the public sector (see Damaska, 1986). Legalistic political systems, such as those of Germany, are

more supportive of the bureaucratic format for public employment than are others such as the Anglo-Saxon systems that focus more on management than law in defining appropriate bureaucratic behavior (Peters, forthcoming). Public administrators in the Anglo-Saxon systems must still comply with basic legal constraints on their behavior, but they may be more willing to focus on the performance of the system and the services being delivered than are public employees in the *Rechtsstaat* systems in Europe.

The nature of the policy being administered can also affect the extent to which bureaucratic models are being applied. Policy areas such as policing and revenue collection that have a strong legal foundation and which involve the basic rights and obligations of citizens, are more appropriately administered in a formal, bureaucratic manner. On the other hand, social, health and educational programs may be better administered using greater discretion on the part of the service providers. There is also some evidence that administered regulatory programs is more effective if the regulators are able to utilize their discretion in enforcing laws (Lundqvist, 1980; Christensen and Laegreid, 2006).

## **Managing Public Personnel: The Civil Service and its Alternatives**

The conventional means of managing public personnel has been to use a merit system based on uniform pay and grading, tenure and firm hierarchies. These merit principles are typically enshrined in civil service systems that create and manage personnel systems that grade positions and individuals and attempt to match the two. That matching is based largely on performance on uniform tests, with program managers having limited discretion in choosing individuals for available positions. Furthermore, promotions and movement up an internal salary scale tends to be determined by seniority rather than by attempts to assess the performance levels of the individual employees.

While the civil service has been a standard instrument for managing personnel for some decades, it also can present significant challenges for managers. The standardization of rewards and the protections provided by the tenure system (and public sector unions in most cases) mean that managers have relatively few ways of motivating their employees. Although we will point out below that for many people in the public sector intrinsic motivations are more important than extrinsic motivations, for example money, the emphasis on uniformity does little or nothing to encourage more than adequate performance.

The constraints inherent in a civil service system have led to attempts to improve personnel management, or at least to make it more like personnel management in the private sector. Many countries have shifted away from civil service systems to personal contract, especially for upper-echelon employees. Performance management has also been introduced to provide clearer targets for the work of public employees and to make both sanctioning and rewarding performance easier. The latter changes have been reinforced by weakening the concept of tenure in public employment so that poor performers can be dismissed.

The other alternative to a civil service system for hiring and managing public employees is to use patronage and to permit elected political officials to hire their own partisan loyalists. We associate this pattern of employment with less-developed countries but advanced democracies also have significant numbers of appointees in public office (see Panizza et al., 2016). Furthermore, patronage provides political leaders with the opportunity to employ people committed to their political programs and to improve the probabilities that public employees will work to implement programs. This is yet another way in which governments must strike some balance between legal responsibility and political responsiveness.

## Recruitment of Public Employees

We have discussed the behavior of public administrators in office, but an equally important question is why individuals choose to become a public employee. For the critics of government and public administration the facile answer might be that they are not qualified to do anything else, but the real answer is more complex. Indeed, if those critics were to meet their public employees, they would most often find a group of qualified and dedicated people who are working to solve complex problems in often difficult circumstances. As Graham Allison (1983) has argued, management in the public sector is substantially more difficult than in the private sector, given the absence of a bottom line such as profit, and having to govern 'in a goldfish bowl'.

In addition, some of the difficulties that managers in government face are also encountered by the lower-echelon workers in government. The demands of accountability and transparency in government make doing the job more demanding. And the legalism of the public sector, even in relatively nonbureaucratic systems, adds additional constraints on government officials. Public officials are also working without clear measures of their success or failure, unlike the availability of profit as a standard in the private sector. Performance management has provided more quantitative evidence of success, but even then the available measures are far from perfect, and often contentious (see Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008). And finally, civil servants do not earn huge compensation for their efforts. We know that many if not most public employees do not join government for financial rewards, and those rewards may be meager considering the responsibilities of their positions.

## Incentives for Joining Government

To understand why people do choose to become public servants we can look at the incentives they may have for accepting a position in the public sector. Every organization can provide its prospective members some benefits, just as that organization may also impose some burdens on the individual. A classic argument for why people will participate in any organization, whether public or private, is that there are material, solidary and purposive incentives (Clark and Wilson, 1961) available to prospective members, and which shape their potential participation in the organization.



## Material incentives

When we consider an individual joining an organization we usually think of the material incentives. What is the level of pay? Will they have a nice office? Or a company car? With a few notable exceptions such as Singapore (Quah, 2003), the material rewards available to public servants, as well as their nominal political masters, are quite modest. These limited rewards for public servants are especially noticeable at the top of the hierarchy in public organizations, with public servants having substantial responsibilities receiving extremely modest payments. For example, top public servants in the US Department of Defense (2015), managing the largest single organization in the world, have salaries of approximately US\$183,000.

Table 3.1 compares the salary levels for top civil servants in a number of countries with the average level of pay in those countries. While these upper-echelon public servants may be earning a good deal more than the average pay, when compared with rewards for individuals in the private sector with comparable responsibilities the rewards are quite modest. The less visible rewards of public employment such as pensions also are rarely superior to those available in the private sector.

While rewards at the top of government are rarely outstanding, and often not competitive, pay and perquisites at the bottom of public organizations are often relatively good. The rewards for working at the street level, or in clerical positions are often good when compared with similar positions in the private sector. Likewise, some professional positions such as teachers are also reasonably well compensated, but other skilled positions such as computer engineers are extremely poorly paid in comparison with working privately.

Much of the above discussion has been about public sector employees in relatively affluent countries in Europe, North America and the Antipodes. In less affluent countries, however, jobs in the public sector are often considered to be very good positions. Even if the pay in these positions in the public sector is far from outstanding, it often is better and certainly more secure than most positions in the private sector. And unfortunately having these positions can also provide an opportunity to extract bribes and other informal rewards for office that can make the positions lucrative.

Although there is a good deal of evidence that material rewards are not particularly important for public employees, as part of the market ideology of the NPM, there has been an increasing use of pay for performance in the public sector.

**Table 3.1** Average pay for higher civil service (as percentage of average wage in economy)

France	Italy	Japan	Germany	Singapore	Sweden	United Kingdom	United States
202	223	131	197	318	139	213	187

Calculated from Brans and Peters (2011), and Hood and Peters, with Lee (2002). These figures represent base salary only and do not include benefits such as pensions and cars, which may add significantly to total compensation.

The assumption is that if individuals are rewarded for good performance they will work harder and perform better. The evidence for that assumption is at best weak (see Moynihan, 2008). Public sector employees appear willing to accept additional pay, but do not appear to strive particularly hard to achieve those financial rewards. Indeed, in some societies when an individual receives additional pay from a performance-based system, the custom is for him or her to share that additional money among co-workers.<sup>4</sup>

Given the above, it is difficult to make generalizations about the material rewards available in the public sector. On the one hand, at the top of the hierarchy the pay tends to be poor, but the perquisites are often at least competitive. Pay at the bottom of the hierarchy, on the other hand, is often better than in the private sector, especially given the relative stability of the positions. Furthermore, in many civil service systems there is little flexibility in making those rewards. In general, however, material rewards in the public sector are rarely good enough by themselves to be able to attract the ‘best and brightest’ to it.

### **Solidary incentives**

As well as joining organizations for material rewards, individuals may join simply because of the people involved in those organizations and the opportunity to be in a congenial environment. These so-called ‘solidary incentives’ are usually associated with social organizations, but they can be important in recruiting, and especially in retaining, members of organizations with other purposes. For example, although most people would consider political parties as concerned with winning elections, studies have demonstrated that many party members are there more so for the social aspects and friendships than for political reasons.

These solidary incentives are often important in retaining public employees. Surveys of employees demonstrate that they like the people they work with and generally are positive about the atmosphere of their organizations (Bertelli, 2007). In addition some organizations in the public sector, such as the military and civilian protective services generally develop an esprit de corps that is important for maintaining the performance of those organizations. There are, of course, major exceptions to this generalization about the public sector, organizations such as the post office in several countries have low morale and significant internal dissension. In addition, NPM and its emphasis on individual performance has tended to reduce morale (and perhaps even performance; see Diefenbach, 2009).

### **Purposive incentives**

Finally, people may choose to join the public sector for purposive reasons. By this we mean that people join an organization because they want to accomplish something through membership in that organization. For example, people may

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<sup>4</sup>Personal communication from several colleagues in Latin American countries.

join a political party because they want to influence public policy, or join a social service agency because they want to help the less-privileged members of the society. Whether it is in the public or the private sector, individuals will participate in order to make things happen.

Public employment can be a powerful means of attempting to shape the economy and society in which one lives. The purposes that motivate individuals to join the public sector may be general, such as providing public service, or they may be more focused in a particular policy area, or toward providing services to a particular segment of the population. Furthermore, there are some policy areas for which the public sector is the only viable alternative for influence – national security being the most obvious example.

The evidence for public employment is that purposive motivations are the most important reasons individuals join and remain in public sector employment (see Table 3.2). Purposive incentives appear to be important for motivating public employees in a wide variety of countries and policy areas. When asked in surveys, public employees tend to emphasize their capacity to serve the public and to make positive contributions in solving social problems, and much of their satisfaction in their jobs tends to derive from their opportunities to serve. These incentives tend to be much stronger than either material or solidary incentives in attracting and retaining public sector employees. This being said, the strength of incentives may vary significantly by the type of job held by the individual public servant. Individuals at the top of administrative hierarchies, and in so-called decision-making positions, are more likely to be motivated by service and the capacity to influence policy. Individuals occupying more routine jobs at the bottom of these hierarchies are more likely to be concerned with material rewards, although individuals providing direct services to clients may also be strongly motivated by service. And as noted above, individuals who are in uniformed services facing dangers may have strong solidary incentives.

### Public service motivation

The strength of purposive motivations discussed above is the foundation for a more fully articulated model of the motivation of civil servants and other public employees. The idea of ‘public service motivation’ is that individuals in government are indeed motivated to accept and perform their jobs primarily through their capacity to provide public services. This very basic idea has been addressed through the development of a set of questions designed to tap into a number of dimensions concerning the attitudes of public employees about their jobs (see Vandenabeele, Brewer and Ritz, 2014). Public service motivation has been conceptualized to be composed of six dimensions (Perry, 1996):

- Attraction of policy-making
- Commitment to the public interest
- Social justice
- Civic duty
- Compassion
- Self-sacrifice

Several of these dimensions are closely related to the ideas of purposive incentives described above, however, they also contain several attributes that are about the substance of policies and the delivery of those policies. That is, as well as wanting to be involved in making policies this concept contains an idea that those policies should promote social justice, and should be delivered in a compassionate manner. Furthermore, this concept appears to contain some elements of professionalism, with inclusion of a dimension of self-sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

These assumed dimensions of public service motivation did not demonstrate sufficient inter-correlation to comprise six unified scales. Rather, the responses of civil servants in the United States to the questions about public service motivation indicated that there was some underlying commitment to the purposive values mentioned above, although these commitments did not correspond neatly to the assumed dimensions of the concept. It appears that while the commitment to public service is rather pervasive, it manifests itself in a variety of ways.

Despite some of the problems with scaling, the components of the concept of public service motivation has been used extensively in the United States, where it originated, and in a wide variety of other settings. Leaving aside for the moment some of the finer points of methodology and scaling, it is important to note the extent to which a general commitment to public service and influence over public policies appears across cultures (see for example, Vandenabeele, 2008).

## Representative Bureaucracy

As well as inquiring what may motivate individuals within public administration, we should also ask what kind of people actually join the government service. For example, how well educated are employees in the public sector? And do people come into the public sector and stay, or do they move in and out of the public sector? Perhaps most importantly, we need to ask to what extent employment in the public sector is representative of their society? These officials are responsible for administering policies for a society, but are they like the society and therefore more likely to reflect the values of that society?

The concept of representative bureaucracy was developed toward the end of World War II. At this time it was clear in the United Kingdom that the first post-war election would produce a Labour government committed to large-scale nationalization of industry and the creation of an extensive welfare state (Hennessey, 1993). The question raised by J. Donald Kingsley (1944) was whether a civil service composed primarily of individuals from an upper-class background and educated at elite institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, would be willing to implement those socialist programs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>A standard sociological definition of professionalism, mentioned above, is that a professional is obliged to place the interest of his or her client ahead of personal interest. For public service motivation this may also mean putting the national interest ahead of any personal rewards.

<sup>6</sup>In the end the implementation went off with few if any problems, but at the time this was a very legitimate issue.

The term 'representative bureaucracy' was originally employed to address the possible negative effects of the composition of the civil service on their abilities to administer certain types of program. Although the original question of representativeness was phrased around issues of social class, in contemporary public administration questions of ethnicity and gender tend to be more central to discussions of representativeness than is class (see Tahvilzadeh, 2012). But social class does still matter, especially for the implementation of social programs that are directed primarily at the poor and the working class.

Representative bureaucracy can be used as both a normative and an empirical concept. Normatively, the argument is that the public sector should be a model employer and ensure that its employees are as representative of the society as possible, and indeed government have sometimes attempted to over-represent the less-advantaged segments of society. These principles of promoting greater equality of employment for the less-advantaged groups within society may be enshrined in law. For example, the constitution of India provides for special treatment of 'scheduled castes' to attempt to redress the inequalities experienced by some segments of society (De Zwart, 2000), and American affirmative action laws mandate that public sector employers take action to employ more members of minority groups.

Most of the research on representative bureaucracy has been empirical, assessing the extent to which public administration, and especially the upper echelons of public administration, are indeed representative of their societies (see Peters, Schröter and von Maravić, 2015). Some examples of these findings are included in Table 3.2. While there are certainly differences among the cases, the general finding is that the upper echelons of the civil service remain somewhat unrepresentative of their populations. In general the upper civil service is more representative in terms of gender than in terms of ethnic minorities, and a few cases are somewhat approaching equality.

Two additional points should be mentioned concerning representative bureaucracy. First, if we were to examine these data across time (see Peters, 2016) there have been significant improvements in the representativeness of public bureaucracies. Again, the differences among countries are significant, as are differences among the various minorities within individual countries. For example, African Americans have not been as successful in moving into the upper echelons of the civil service in the United States as have Latin Americans. And in general women have been more successful than minorities in reaching the upper reaches of public administration.

The second point is that most of the information we have on representativeness is for the upper echelons of public administration. If, however, we were to extend the data to lower echelons of the public sector then the findings would be somewhat different. First, for government as a whole, women tend to make up the majority of employment. This is in large part because several jobs in the public sector – teachers, nurses, secretaries – have traditionally been 'women's work'. Furthermore, these jobs make up a significant share of public employment in most countries: teachers are approximately 30 percent of total civilian employment in the United States.

**Table 3.2** Representation of minority groups and women in public administration (numbers are percentages)**(a) Ethnic representation in public administration***United States (Higher Federal Civil Service)*

African American 8

Hispanic 6

Asian American 5

*Canada*

Anglophone 67

Francophone 32

*India*

Dominant group 95

Others 5

**(b) Gender representation in higher-level public administration**

Country Percentage of women

Australia 19

Belgium 14

Canada 27

Israel 10

Norway 37

Sweden 38

United Kingdom 17

United States 19

*Sources:* Peters (2009); Peters et al. (2015). The comparison among these cases is difficult. These are derived from different sources and may cover different segments of public administration. Even with that, however, they do provide some understanding of variations in representativeness.

The representativeness of the lower levels of public administration can be especially beneficial for the delivery of public services (Maynard-Mooney and Musheno, 2012). Given that the recipients of social programs are disproportionately members of minority groups, having street-level bureaucrats who are also members of those groups may facilitate the delivery of those programs. In many cases, the capacity to speak the language of the program recipient, or to understand the values of that recipient, will be important contributions to effective service delivery.

Representative bureaucracy is also discussed in active and passive terms (Kennedy, 2013). Most of the discussion is about a simple sociological representation, without any clear assumptions about what difference the representativeness makes for decision-making by public employees. More active versions of representative bureaucracy (see Selden, 1997; Kennedy, 2014) assume that the

individuals will indeed make decisions influenced by their gender or their minority status. The more active conceptions of representation tend also toward the normative argument that these employees should make decisions on this basis.

## The Other Public Sector

To this point we have been discussing the members of the public administration who are formally employed in the public sector. We also need to consider the nature of the people employed by government indirectly. Governments have found it advantageous to utilize a variety of different market and non-market actors to deliver public services, or to provide goods and services required by government. These indirect employees, and the services they provide, are extremely diverse, ranging from religious groups providing social services to private security companies protecting government facilities in danger zones. These employees may be connected to government through contracts, through partnership arrangements or through their involvement in policy networks. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide definitive information about these employees, or even to enumerate them (see Derlien and Peters, 2008), we do need to recognize their importance for the public sector. In some cases private employees may be more acceptable to clients than are direct public employees, for example, immigrants fearing being deported by government. And employment through the private sector can be more flexible than through civil service systems based on tenure and stability, allowing governments to add employees for peak demand times without needing to offer continued employment. Finally, using private contractors may permit government to mobilize talent that they might not be able to afford otherwise.<sup>7</sup>

However, while bringing in contractors may increase efficiency in public service delivery, it may also create problems. Leaving aside issues related to contracts as such, private contracts brought in to manage services where public law is exercised has proven to be a significant challenge. For instance, privately run prisons in the United States have been found to be poorly staffed by employees who were given only a minimum level of training for those challenging jobs (Bozeman, 2007). More broadly, Freeman (2003) discusses whether private contractors, as part of the contract specifications, should be obliged to put their staff through training programs specifically designed to give their staff some knowledge on public sector norms and ethics. Her conclusion is that this would make private businesses de facto components of the public sector and it would also mean that they would most likely not be very competitive in other markets (Freeman, 2003; see Pierre and Painter, 2010).

A consideration of the full range of employment that is funded by public money and/or is delivering public service provides a more complete perspective on public administration. If we think only about the formal members of the civil

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<sup>7</sup>There are dangers in this strategy, however, as the experience of computer contractors involved with launching the exchanges in Obamacare demonstrated in the United States (Lipton, Austen and Lafreniere, 2013).

service and analogous organizations we can ignore a large, and apparently growing, segment of public activity. Furthermore, we need to question the extent to which these providers of public services are more or less representative of the public than is the civil service, and if they are as motivated by values of public service as are the officials employed in the public sector.

## Summary and Conclusions

Although we think about the public bureaucracy as a set of organizations, or perhaps one big organization, organizations are empty vessels unless inhabited by people. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the roles played by individual public employees in delivering public services, and the capacity those public employees have for making decisions that affect the lives of ordinary citizens. All positions in the public bureaucracy involve making decisions, and often extremely difficult decisions, that affect the lives of other people. We will discuss how best to understand that decision-making in a subsequent chapter, in this chapter we emphasized the decision-makers themselves.

This chapter has also emphasized the importance of getting the 'right' people to become public employees. There are two dimensions of recruitment that are especially important for the performance of public organizations. The first is the need to attract the 'best and brightest' to government. The public bureaucracy is often denigrated as a place to work for anyone with skills and talent, yet many extraordinary people do choose to spend their careers in public service. They make those career choices, often with significant financial sacrifices, in order to be able to work on important public policy issues and to serve their fellow citizens.

In addition to attracting highly qualified people, governments must be concerned about making the public sector as representative of the society as a whole as possible. Representativeness is an important attribute for the public bureaucracy, both for democratic reasons and to be able to enhance their effectiveness in delivering services to a diverse public. Few governments have achieved the high level of involvement of ethnic and religious minorities in government that they may like, in large part because education systems tend to be less welcoming for these citizens than for the dominant communities, but the employment of women has increased more rapidly.

Although the remainder of this book will focus on structure and process more than on the persons involved, we need always remember that it is the people involved who animate the actions of the public sector. Clever people may design elegant institutional structures and efficient processes for governing, but if the individuals involved (politicians as well as the public administrators being discussed here) are not equally adept then little good is likely to emerge from all the work of designing structures and processes.