

**Article: “1999 John Gaus Lecture - The Repositioning of American Public Administration”**

**Author: H. George Frederickson**

**Issue: Dec. 1999**

**Journal: *PS: Political Science & Politics***



***This journal is published by the American Political Science Association. All rights reserved.***

---

APSA is posting this article for public view on its website. APSA journals are fully accessible to APSA members and institutional subscribers. To view the table of contents or abstracts from this or any of APSA's journals, please go to the website of our publisher Cambridge University Press (<http://journals.cambridge.org>).

This article may only be used for personal, non-commercial, or limited classroom use. For permissions for all other uses of this article should be directed to Cambridge University Press at [permissions@cup.org](mailto:permissions@cup.org).

# The Repositioning of American Public Administration

Younger public administration scholars may not regard this lecture and the public administration panels at this conference as remarkable. I do, and I suspect others of my generation would agree. Twenty years ago, public administration had all but disappeared as a field of political science and in the affairs of the American Political Science Association. Now, the Annual Meeting of APSA is a primary venue for the presentation of serious research on public administration

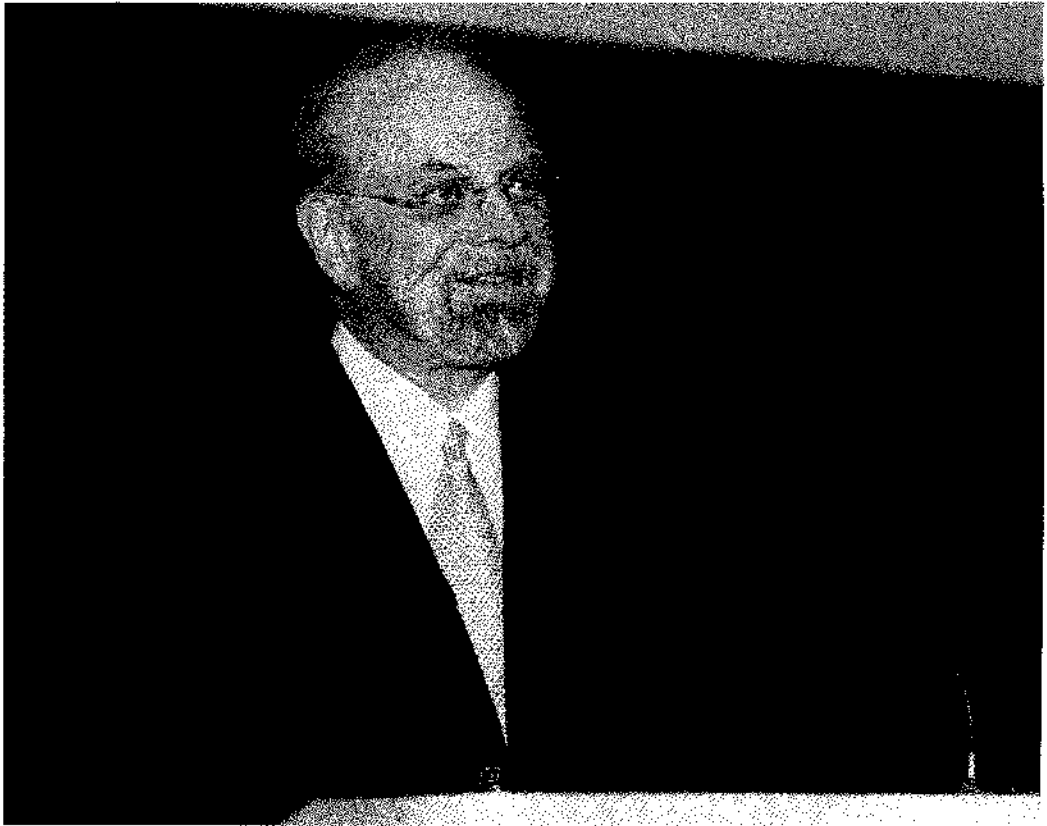
by  
**H. George Frederickson,**  
 University of Kansas

by whatever nomenclature—public management, bureaucracy, policy implementation, governance. Recent presidents of APSA have been associated with the field of public administration

and the PA section is large and vibrant. In the reemergence of public administration in APSA, it is essential to point out, however, that there are still too few pages dealing with the field in the *American Political Science Review* and the *APSR* needs a book review section dedicated to public administration.

It is a particular pleasure for me to have witnessed the reemergence of the field of public administration in political science and especially to have been selected to give the last Gaus Lecture of the twentieth century.

This is a kind of public administration millennial moment, which tempts me to give a Gaus Lecture that takes stock of the field. I shall not resist that temptation. The title of my lecture is “The Repositioning of American Public Administration.”



**H. George Frederickson**, 1999 John Gaus Distinguished Lecturer.

Public administration in its modern form has been a key element in the effectiveness of American government in the twentieth century, the American Century. It is interesting to note that the modern, self-aware field of public administration began in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries and its modern history could be said to roughly parallel that of the twentieth century. In this century, it has been evident at all levels of American government that the Founders' conceptions of democratic self-government, on one hand, and the idea of a merit-based and permanent professional public service, on the other hand, are essentially compatible. Despite some political rhetoric in the later decades of the century to the effect that bureaucracy has been out of control, the evidence runs strongly to the contrary. Tested over the years, the practices of public administration have proved to be both administratively competent and politically responsive in the fullest democratic sense. Virtually every significant accomplishment of American democratic government—achieving victory in world war, winning the space race, sharply reducing corruption in government, building and maintaining the national highway system, getting out of the Great Depression, facilitating the recovery of Europe and Asia following World War II, harnessing nuclear energy, lengthening the human life span and controlling diseases, and many, many more—have been effectively implemented by public administration. There is, therefore, no exaggeration in the claim that the American Century has also been an administrative century.

As we close the century, both the practices and the theories of public administration have undergone a significant repositioning. Tonight I will define what I mean by the repositioning of public administration and describe the primary applied and conceptual elements of that repositioning. When that is complete, I shall make a few comments about the future of public administration.

One of the fashions of the day is to place the prefix "re" in front of a strong noun, as in "to reinvent" or "to reengineer." To stay abreast of the tastemakers, I argue here that public administration is rapidly repositioning itself, particularly as a field of political science. Al-

though arbitrary and imprecise, this repositioning began in the mid-to-late 1980s, at about the time of the publication of James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy* (1989) and March and Olsen's *Rediscovering Institutions* (1989).

This emergent public administration has a new language and its own unique voice. This language is distinct from the dominant theories of public administration in the sixties, seventies, and eighties—decision theory, mar-

ket or public choice theory, policy analytic theory, respectively. The decade of the 1990s has produced a strong cohort of theorists and theories, all of them essentially indigenous to public administration. The colonizing influence of economics, policy analysis, and organization theory has receded, to be replaced by a new self-aware public administration. By the end of the 1990s, a repositioned public administration is richly empirical and theoretically robust. Indeed, public administration has become not only an important field of political science, it is now an important contributor to political science.

The core of the repositioning of American public administration argument is this: Theories and concepts of the clash of interests, of electoral and interest group competition, of games, and of winners and losers have dominated and continue to dominate political science. Public administration is steadily moving away from these theories and concepts toward theories of cooperation, networking, governance, and institution building and maintenance. Public administration, both in practice and in theory, is repositioning itself to deal with the daunting problems associated with the disarticulation of the state. In short, a repositioned public administration is the political science of making the fragmented and disarticulated state work.

## The Fragmented and Disarticulated State

The most important feature of contemporary public administration is the declining relationship between jurisdiction and public management.<sup>1</sup> Jurisdictions of all types—nation-states, states, provinces, cities, counties, and special districts—are losing their borders (Strange 1996). Economic activity, which was once at least somewhat "local" in the sense of being contained within the borders of a jurisdiction, is increasingly multijurisdictional or nonjurisdictional. Investments, production, and consumption are seldom geographically contained, and this trend is destined to increase. The new global economy is sometimes described as "the end of geography." The revolution in telecommunications has forever altered the meaning of physical space and thereby forever altered the importance of borders and boundaries, a primary element of the idea of jurisdiction. These changes in economics and telecommunications have changed human social relationships, particularly relationships between those who are educationally, economically, and politically significant, and their "residence" or their "citizenship." These people are linked less and less to a single specific locale or jurisdiction and are linked more and more bicoastally, transnationally, and globally.

These points are neither new nor startling. What is important is how these trends affect public management. How do you define and understand public management when the city, the state, and the nation-state are less relevant? How do you define and understand public management when sovereignty is in considerable doubt? One defining principle of democratic theory is a congruent or symmetrical relationship between the governed and those who govern. It is difficult to conceptualize representative

**Public administration  
is steadily moving  
. . . toward theories  
of cooperation, net-  
working, gover-  
nance, and institu-  
tion building and  
maintenance.**

democracy when many important decisions that affect the lives of the represented are often not controlled or even influenced by those who represent them. How do we define and understand public management when it is not always entirely clear for whom we work?

The second important feature of contemporary public management is the so-called disarticulation of the state. The capacity of the state to deal with complex social and economic issues has eroded significantly. Crime, for example, often has its origins in other jurisdictions. There is evidence that North Korea is in the drug trade. Miami is infested with Russian crime gangs. Acid rain and water pollution start in one set of jurisdictions and profoundly affect many others. The oceans, seas, and rivers are polluted by sewage and fertilizer run-off. Immigrants and a growing number of refugees move across porous borders. As the borders and the sovereignty of jurisdictions decline in importance, there is a corresponding decline in the capacity of jurisdictions to significantly contain some public policy issues and, therefore, in the jurisdictions' ability to "manage" them.

The third important feature of contemporary public management is a broadly based redefinition of what it means to be "public." In the history of traditional public administration, the word *public* was usually understood to mean "government." Public management is now understood to include government but also all of those organizations and institutions that contract with government to do governmental work, those institutions and organizations that are essentially public serving—the so-called nongovernmental organizations—and the wide range of organizations and institutions that are essentially quasi-governmental in their relationship with citizens—such as privately held utilities (Kettl 1993). The distinctions between institutions that are essentially public in character and institutions that are private and profit making are now fuzzy (Bozeman 1987; Frederickson 1997a). Modern public management has developed a nuanced conception of institutions that are governmental, nonprofit, and corporate, but also primarily public serving, on the one hand, and institutions that are clearly profit making and in an identifiable market, on the other hand.

Finally, public management itself is changing, being reformed from both within and without. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 brought on hundreds of new political appointees, strengthening the president's policy control. At the same time, congressional micromanagement increased, resulting in the comanagement of the federal bureaucracy by the president and congressional leaders (Gilmour and Halley 1994). The U.S. federal civil service has been significantly downsized, but may have essentially as many people on the payroll as a result of increased contracting-out. This downsizing of the federal bureaucracy is, as Paul Light puts it, an illusion. The illusion of downsizing has resulted in significant further illusions of merit, illusions of accountability, and illusions of capacity (Light 1999). Cynics suggest that to save the

bureaucracy it has been necessary to hide it by contracting out much of its work.

There have been attempts to reduce the middle layers of bureaucracy, the so-called "thickening" of government (Light 1995). The power of civil service staff agencies in the federal government and in many state and city governments has been sharply reduced, giving line managers more power over hiring, promotion, and pay. Public managers are increasingly freed from purchasing and other regulations and are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and to take risks. The performance and evaluation movement is well along, and performance measures, benchmarks, outcomes, and other measures of bureaucratic effectiveness and policy results have been developed. The day-to-day work of public administration is less insulated from politics—the effects of the much larger number of political appointees given the president under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, as well as similar developments in several states. At the city level, the council-manager form of government is increasingly political, having been influenced by the adoption of elected—and in many cases full-time—mayors, council members elected by district rather than at-large, and the trend to pay and provide staff for council members (Nalbandian 1991). Finally, American local government is increasingly fragmented, with special districts continuing to grow in number and importance (Burns 1994). This fragmentation increases rather than diminishes the "silo" or "policy autonomy" characteristics of government.

The contours of modern public management show a set of problems and issues that appears to be in many ways beyond the reach of those who must cope with them.

## **The Public Administration Response to the Disarticulated State, in Theory and Practice**

To cope with these problems, the contemporary practices of public administration have jumped ahead of theory. The theoretical perspective I will propose, therefore, is based on contemporary practices that appear to be specifically designed to solve, to ameliorate, or at least to address issues associated with the disarticulation of the state, high jurisdictional and disciplinary fragmentation, and diminished bureaucratic capacity.

These theories and practices are, first, the new institutionalism, second, network theory, and, third, governance theory.

### *Institutionalism*

As we close the twentieth century, many of the most influential ideas of contemporary public administration are now a part of a broadly defined institutionalism.

In simplified form, institutionalism sees organizations as social constructs of rules, roles, norms, and the expectations that constrain individual and group choice and behavior. March and Olsen described institutions as "the beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge that support rules and routines," a description which differs

little from classic sociological organization theory (1989, 22). But institutionalism also includes core ideas of contemporary public administration—results, performance, outcomes, and purposefulness—concepts of less interest to organization theorists (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). Institutionalism, then, could be said to account for both how institutions behave and how they perform (Lynn 1996). Institutionalism also combines the structural or organizational elements of institutions and the managerial and leadership elements of institutions (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999; Wilson 1989). Finally, institutionalism is not limited to formal governmental organizations, which was a large blind spot for earlier public administration scholars, and now includes empirical and theoretical considerations of the full range of so-called “third sector” organization (Kettl 1988, 1993; Light 1999; Salomon 1989).

The perspective and tone of institutionalism in public administration was set in 1989 with the publication of the two foundation documents, Wilson’s *Bureaucracy* and March and Olsen’s *Rediscovering Institutions*. Both Wilson and March and Olsen point to the limitations of economics and market logic as the theory that accounts for institutional behavior. They build their theories on consideration of structure, particularly hierarchy, and individual and group behavior in institutional contexts, on the interaction of individuals and organizations and their wider political, social, and economic contexts, and on the influence of professional and cultural norms on institutional behavior patterns and on institutional longevity and productivity. Much of the leading scholarship in public administration in the 1990s fits generally into the categories and concepts set out by Wilson and March and Olsen. It could be said in contemporary public administration that we are all now institutionalists.

The golden age of public administration hegemony disintegrated in the 1950s. Let me suggest that as we enter the twenty-first century a new public administration hegemony is emerging based on a broadly accepted institutionalism. Institutionalism is not a theory in the formal sense, but is, instead, the framework, the language, and the set of assumptions that hold and guide empirical research and theory building in public administration. It begins with an argument as to the salience of collective organizational action as a basis for understanding political and social institutions. This is a challenge to a political science that emphasizes institutions as the framework for rational individual choice and emphasizes conflicting interests and competition (Schattschneider 1960). Institutions are affected by their social, economic, and political context but also powerfully affect that context. “Political democracy depends not only on economic and social contributions but also on the design of political institutions” (March and Olsen 1984, 738). The importance of the design of institutions on their behavior and on their political outcomes has been amply demonstrated (see, e.g., Lijphart 1984; Weaver and Rockman 1993).

Institutionalism assumes that policy preferences are neither exogenous nor stable but are molded through

experience and by institutions, by education, and, particularly, by professions.

Institutionalism assumes the centrality of leadership, management, and professionalism and comprehends theory development all the way from the supervision of street-level bureaucrats to the transformational leadership of whole institutions.

Institutionalism recognizes the salience of action or choice and defines choice as expressions of expectations of consequences (March and Olsen 1984). In the modern world of productivity, performance, and outcomes measurement, institutionalism reminds us that institutions and those associated with them shape meanings, rely on symbols, and seek an interpretive order that obscures the objectivity of outcomes.

Institutionalism is particularly useful in the world of the disarticulated state because its assumptions do not rest primarily on sovereignty and authority, but rest instead on the patterns of politics, order, and shared meaning found in both governmental as well as nongovernmental institutions.

**Institutionalism is particularly useful in the world of the disarticulated state because its assumptions do not rest primarily on sovereignty and authority, but rest instead on the patterns of politics, order, and shared meaning found in both governmental as well as nongovernmental institutions.**

Finally, institutionalism lends itself to forms of modeling based on simplifying assumptions other than rational self-interest or competitive markets. Some of the most advanced thinking in contemporary public administration is being done by formal modelers using assumptions of cooperation, order, hierarchy, institutional responses to contextual influences, networks, and governance—all essentially institutional assumptions (Hammond 1993, 1996; Hammond and Knott 1996, 1999; Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 1999; O’Toole and Meier 1999). It is my guess that this theory

building will have a stronger and more lasting influence on the quality of our scholarship than have rational choice models. The reason is simple—the simplifying assumptions used by these contemporary modelers are much closer to institutional reality than are public choice assumptions.

#### *Public Sector Network Theory*

Public sector networks are understood to be structures of interdependence. They exhibit both formal and infor-

mal linkages that include exchange or reciprocal relations, common interests, and bonds of shared beliefs and professional perspectives. "In more concrete terms, networks include interagency cooperative ventures, intergovernmental program management structures, complex contracting arrays, and public-private partnerships. They also include service-delivery systems reliant on clusters of providers that may include public agencies, business firms, not-for-profits, or even volunteer-staffed units all linked by interdependence and some shared program of interests" (O'Toole 1997b, 446).

It is evident that network theory accounts for an increasing percentage of the activities of public programs, operating through "networked constellations" (Kettl 1993; Milward 1994; O'Toole 1997a, 1997b, 446). Studies at the level of the nation-state describe the working of such networks (see, e.g., Hanf 1994; Hufen and Ringling 1990; Hull and Hjern 1987; Scharpf 1993).

If networks at the operational level are growing in importance, how should they be approached theoretically? Network theory, or at least the network metaphor, is thought of in organizational sociology and in parts of academic business administration as that which is situated between hierarchies and markets (Powell 1990). Using this assumption, La Porte (1996) described three vantages on public organizational networks. The first vantage is from within the network, as one part of the network, viewing the rest of the network horizontally. From this vantage, the logic of Thompson's theory of uncertainty reduction is particularly relevant, as are theories of contingency and resource dependence. Two important aspects of organization theory—loosely-coupled systems (Cohen and March 1986) and link-pin functions (Likert 1967) are relevant here. In the case of the metropolitan area, this vantage would be from the position of the particular city or other jurisdiction or from the position of a department or agency, like public works or law enforcement, within a city. What I will describe later as metropolitan administrative conjunction occurs at this level of networks.

The second vantage is from a position above the net, such as the air traffic control function of the Federal Aviation Administration or the council of governments in a metropolitan area. La Porte (1996) suggests that the new institutionalism is a form of network theory that accounts for network behavior from this angle, thereby constituting the institutionalization of forms of cooperation and integration.

The third vantage is from along the sides of networks, among the networks, locations that allow one to view networks without necessarily being a part of them. From this vantage, theories of federalism, intergovernmental relations, and policy implementation are all forms of network theory.

Network theory is now rather advanced. Drawing on research on the commons (Ostrom 1987), transaction cost analysis (Williamson 1985), prisoner's dilemma and other repetitive tests of the probability of cooperation

(Axelrod 1984), and studies of bargaining and negotiation (Harsanyi 1977; Scharpf 1993), network theory explains patterns of cooperation under conditions of interdependence.

The focus of network theorists on nonhierarchical and nonmarket cooperation is especially relevant to public administration responses to the changing context of our work and particularly on the disarticulation of the state. In the network theory literature there are advanced explanations of the conditions under which self-coordination is most and least likely (Scharpf 1993); tests of the Coase Theorem, which claims that voluntary contact between autonomous self-interested agents is as likely to produce common welfare gains as is hierarchical coordination (Coase 1960); considerations of problems of motivation in the absence of hierarchies or markets (Milgrom and Roberts 1990); discussions of problems of information asymmetry (Ouchi 1984; Scharpf 1977); predictions of likely preconditions for self-coordination (Scharpf 1989); considerations of influences of hostility, competition, self-interest, and network size on patterns of negotiation and likely cooperation; explanations for self-cooperation "in the shadow of hierarchy" (Scharpf 1993) and in the absence of hierarchy (Chisolm 1989); explanations of how networks evolve into emergent formal structures (Axelrod 1984; Sable 1993); and descriptions of the dynamic and "shapeless" characteristics of networks (Scharpf 1993). Virtually all of these explanations of cooperation in network theory are relevant and applicable to cooperative patterns in American metropolitan areas, and they help us understand how public administration is responding to its changing context.

### Governance

It was Harlan Cleveland who wrote in the 1970s that the American people want less government and more governance. He was prophetic. Those who contribute to or follow the modern literature of public administration will have noticed that in many quarters the phrase *public administration* has been replaced by the word *governance*. Much of that literature does not bother to define the new term (Osborne and Gaebler 1987), so it must be assumed that governance is used in place of public administration to distance the writer from the traditions of public administration and from criticisms of bureaucracy (Frederickson 1997b). Recent scholarship, however, takes governance seriously as an idea and uses it both as a surrogate for public administration and a broad contextual description of the field. Among the most important contributions to this literature is the emergent work of Laurence E. Lynn Jr., Carolyn J. Heinrich, and Carolyn J. Hill (1999). In an ambitious synthesis of the field, they have defined governance as: "How, why, and with what consequences government is organized and managed . . . [it] is viewed as configurations of structural elements." They further write, "The term 'governance' implies a configuration of separable but interrelated elements—statutes, policy mandates, organizational, fi-

nancial, and programmatic structures, administrative rules and guidelines, and institutionalized rules and norms—which in combination establish the ends and means of governmental activity. Any particular configuration—within a policy domain (e.g., environmental protection), with respect to a type of government activity (e.g., regulation), within a particular jurisdiction (e.g., a state or a city), or within a particular organization (e.g., a department of human services) or organizational field (child serving agencies)—is the resultant of a dynamic process which we shall refer to as the ‘logic of governance.’ This process links the values and interests of citizens, legislative choice, executive and organizational structures and roles, and judicial oversight in a manner that suggests interrelationships among them that might have significant consequences for performance” (1999,1,3). The authors continue, “Milward and O’Toole (forthcoming) identify two separate intellectual traditions that have contributed to the etymology of the term ‘governance’ as it is presently used. First, the study of institutions has emphasized the multi-layered structural context of rule-governed understandings. Elinor Ostrom and other public choice scholars are among the primary contributors to the institutional roots of governance research. Second, the study of networks has emphasized ‘the role of multiple social actors in networks of negotiation, implementation, and delivery . . . . ‘Governance’ requires social partners and the knowledge of how to concert action among them . . . (O’Toole 1993)” (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 1999, 4).

It will be noted that many elements of the description/definition of governance used by Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill generally resemble elements of traditional public administration, although governance is a broader idea. Governance also includes the key elements of both institutionalism and network theory.

Like the logic of advantages in networks, governance, according to Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill, is understood to function at three levels. At the institutional level, one finds stable formal and informal rules, hierarchies, boundaries, procedures, regime values, and some form of authority. Several bodies of thought contribute to an understanding of the institutional level of governance, including administrative law and other forms of “legal idealism,” theories of the working of large-scale bureaucracies, theories of political economy,

and theories of political control of bureaucracy. At this level, the following theories are especially important: institutional theory, the theory of rent seeking, theories of control of bureaucracy, and theories or philosophies of the purposes of government. This part of governance is also associated with what has come to be known as the policy studies approach to public administration. For nation-states and other formal jurisdictions including cities, it is at this level that the changing context of public administration is most problematic.

At the organizational or managerial level of governance one finds the hierarchical bureaus, departments, commissions, and agencies of the executive branch of government as well as the lateral nongovernmental organizations linked by contract and in other ways to government. At this level, the issues of incentives, administrative discretion, performance measures, and civil service functioning are most important. The currently popular theories are principal-agent theory, transaction cost analysis, theories of collective action, network theory, and the reemergent theories of leadership. It is at this level in the conception of governance that one finds the considerable activities of public administrators to deal with the problems brought about by the changing context of the field.

At the technical or primary work level of governance one finds the task environment and the carrying out of public policy at the street level. Issues of professionalism, technical competence, motivation, accountability, and performance are important here. The most useful current theories and analytic techniques are measures of efficiency, techniques of management, organizational culture, leadership, accountability mechanisms, incentives, and performance measurements.

Governance theory, as the combination of institutionalism and network theory, is also important because it is closely tied to the big issues of democratic government (Peters 1998). It is in governance theory that public administration wrestles with problems of representation, political control of bureaucracy, and the democratic legitimacy of institutions and networks in this time of the fragmented and disarticulated state.

Having described the problem of the disarticulation of the state, and having made the claim that public administration is repositioning itself to deal with the problems of the disarticulated state, and having set out the three primary theories guiding our work, let me now turn to a metaphor and an illustration of modern public administration at work.

## **Administrative Conjunction**

The metropolitan area is a splendid metaphor for describing the changes underway in the broad context of public administration and particularly the problem of the disarticulation of the state. In employing this metaphor, I will first describe patterns of what I will call administrative conjunction in the Kansas City metropolitan area and then sketch the salient premises of the theory of public administrative conjunction. The contemporary practices of administrative conjunction appear to be spe-

cifically designed to solve, to ameliorate, or at least to address issues associated with the disarticulation of the state, high jurisdictional and disciplinary fragmentation, and diminished bureaucratic capacity. While these practices are found throughout modern public administration, they are nowhere more evident than in the day-to-day work of the officials of cities, counties, school districts, special districts, and councils of government found in American metropolitan areas. In the high fragmentation of the American metropolis one can find most of the features of the disarticulated state—the declining salience of jurisdiction, the fuzziness of borders, a growing asymmetry in the relationship between the governed and those who govern, and an erosion of the capacity of the jurisdiction to contain and, thereby, manage complex social, economic, and political issues. Within the American metropolis one can also find the practices of public administration that address these challenges. For these reasons, I argue that the metropolitan area is the best empirical referent for the development of theory having to do with changes underway in public administration practices generally.

Thirty-five years ago, in a brilliant insight, Matthew Holden Jr. (1964) suggested that the American metropolitan area could best be understood as a problem in diplomacy. In the high jurisdictional fragmentation of the metropolis, the important actions of one actor will affect all the other actors. It is, therefore, the case that in the absence of a central authority, and under conditions of high interdependence, there are highly developed systems of cooperation and agreement in metropolitan areas that serve essentially the same purpose as the practices of diplomacy between nation-states. As is the case in diplomacy, patterns of cooperation and agreement in the metropolis vary by the policy subject matter, the status and interests of actors, the permanence or transience of issues, and the relative level of process and procedure formality. As Holden noted, “The relevant municipal bureaucrats are those more-or-less permanent senior officials of the government departments and an impressionistic judgment would be that most inter-governmental contact takes place at this level (finance director-to-finance director or health officer-to-health officer).” Holden’s impression of 35 years ago was exactly right.

In developing his argument, Holden borrowed from the political science field of international relations, particularly from the work of Ernst B. Haas (1960). Following Peter, the son of Ernst Haas: “An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (P. Haas 1992, 3). Professionals operating within epistemic communities have a shared set of normative beliefs, causal beliefs, notions of validity and “truth,” and a common set of practices. While Haas was describing professionals in different nation-states working out agreements for cleaning up the Mediterranean, his description of epistemic communities is essentially the same thing as matters of multijurisdictional cooperation and agreement between professionals described in metropolitan administrative conjunction.

Epistemic communities socially construct knowledge and share a consensus regarding what is known. Peter Haas put it this way: “Presented with incomplete or ambiguous evidence, members of an epistemic community would draw similar interpretations and make similar policy conclusions. If consulted or placed in a policy-making position, they would offer similar advice. . . . Unlike an interest group, confronted with anomalous data, they would retract their advice or suspend judgment” (P. Haas 1990, 55). By doing this, groups of like-minded professionals retain a kind of neutral competence and a form of scientific legitimacy, patterns of behavior that would be recognized immediately by any serious student of public administration. Haas and others claim that the emergence and character of newer forms of international cooperation can best be explained by the formation of epistemic communities of like-minded professionals who cooperate to solve problems because they recognize that informal nonmandated cooperation is the

only way that some problems will be solved.

Craig W. Thomas has recently completed a study of resource management agencies in California and has demonstrated that the concept of epistemic communities best explains how and why individuals and agencies cooperate (Thomas 1997). In his study, Thomas informs epistemic community theory with a good bit of organization theory. He reminds us of James D. Thompson’s argument that the fundamental problem in complex organizations is coping with uncertainty (Thompson 1967). “The mere presence and knowledge based authority of an epistemic community are insufficient conditions for cooperative efforts to expand beyond the community itself. Public agencies will not change their

**In the high fragmentation of the American metropolis one can find most of the features of the disarticulated state—the declining salience of jurisdiction, the fuzziness of borders, a growing asymmetry in the relationship between the governed and those who govern, and an erosion of the capacity of the jurisdiction to contain and, thereby, manage complex social, economic, and political issues.**

missions and agency executives will not sacrifice their autonomy for the purposes of interagency cooperation simply because of the emergence of epistemic knowledge within agencies. To the contrary, contextual factors are definitive. Agency executives are unlikely to adopt an epistemic community’s logic of agency interdependence

and cooperation unless that logic presents a means for alleviating uncertainties that impinge upon their organizations" (Thomas 1997, 243–44). The officials of the resource management agencies in California found that interagency cooperation helped them achieve their shared values and, thereby, reduced organizational uncertainty.

Similar studies have found similar reasons for interagency cooperation among school districts seeking to lower costs (Weiss 1990); among public transportation systems that share routes and riders (Chisolm 1989), among those concerned with regional growth management (Agranoff and McGuire 1998), and among those who deliver human services (Bardach and Lesser 1996).

The key to such cooperation is interdependence, and there are no more interdependent jurisdictions, organizations, and institutions than those that make up metropolitan areas. It should be no surprise, then, that one finds highly developed forms of cooperation in metropolitan areas, cooperation that is in large part driven by a shared understanding of interdependence and a shared need to reduce uncertainty. In our time, much of the uncertainty faced by the cities, counties, and other jurisdictions of metropolitan areas has to do with the changing context of public administration.

To describe the little theory of administrative conjunction, I turn to a consideration of the case of greater Kansas City. The Kansas City metropolitan area includes two states, five counties, two central cities, 31 suburban cities, 26 school districts, and a varying number of special districts (depending on the definition of "special district"). While no two metropolitan areas are alike, they are all rather similar, particularly in governmental terms. Therefore, while this is a study of greater Kansas City, I suggest that the findings and the theoretical points made here are generalizable.

The Kansas City metropolitan area exhibits all four of the characteristics of the context of public administration I described earlier. The borders of jurisdictions are porous. Problems are seldom contained in a single jurisdiction. Many residents have little social, political, or financial commitment to the jurisdictions in which they live or work. The largest cities, the inner cities, have the least capacity and the greatest problems. The tempo of contracting-out and developing alternative delivery systems is increasing in many jurisdictions. Finally, political leadership within jurisdictions is more important than political leadership between the jurisdictions. The people like fragmentation and resist consolidation, but want the metropolitan area to work and act like a polity. As one sage observer put it, "The metropolitan area has problems; the people have cities."

Researching Kansas City, my colleagues and I found its metropolitan governance to be functional, organized, well-operated, and sustained by like-minded professionals sharing a common educational background and set of values.<sup>2</sup> This conjunction is best understood as metropolitan areawide horizontal linkages that mirror the primary categories and subcategories of local government. For example, almost all the directors of public works in all the cities in greater Kansas City are engineers, have both

formal and informal agreements, meet together at least monthly, have newsletters, use email extensively, work together on policy innovation as well as coordination, belong to the same national professional organizations—including their local Kansas City chapters—have shared values, and manage contracts with many of the same profit and nonprofit organizations. The primary

subcategories of public works—roads and highways, water, storm water, sanitary sewers and sewage treatment, solid waste, and so forth—all exhibit the same conjunction characteristics. The practice of metropolitan conjunction found in the category of public works and its subcategories resembles approximately the practices of metropolitan conjunction in the other categories of local government such as law enforcement, court, jails, probation and parole, parks and recreation, fire protection, emergency services, libraries, transportation, and social services. Metropolitan conjunction, then, is deeply functional or, to use the public administration word, "departmental."

It is important to note the differences between local government and metropolitan conjunction. Local government is institutional. It is characterized by jurisdictional elections, boundaries, populations, revenues, staff, positions, and laws and statutes. On the other hand, metropolitan conjunction is better described with reference to forms of mandated and unmandated lateral cooperation between jurisdictions.

We found that politics—campaigns, elections, offices, titles—are jurisdictional, autonomous, and only slightly interdependent. Administration is, by comparison, highly interdependent. This interdependence has resulted in extensive conjunction and remarkably organized patterns of self-cooperation.

The power to carry out interagency conjunction is based on the professional or expert's authoritative claim to knowledge, not on formal authority. The quality and substance of functionally based metropolitan conjunction is understood to be determined by the (1) scope of agreement or cooperation, (2) the strength of agreement or cooperation, and (3) the duration of agreement or cooperation. Appointed local government executives (department heads and above) in Kansas City spend an average of 15% of their time practicing administrative conjunction, as I describe it here. This cooperation appears to influence policy in important ways.

Based on the greater Kansas City metropolitan area case, and on my earlier fixing of the theory of administrative conjunction at the intersection of institutionalism, network theory, and governance theory, I suggest the following definition of conjunction theory and offer some hypotheses.

#### *Definition*

Administration conjunction is the array and character of horizontal formal and informal association between actors representing units in a networked public and the administrative behavior of those actors.

## Hypotheses

- H-1-a. Institutions—which is to say jurisdictions and hierarchy—are necessary preconditions to administrative conjunction.
- H-2-a. Politics—which is to say campaigns, elections, office holding, and formal statutory or ordinance authority—is deeply jurisdictional.
- H-2-b. Jurisdictional politics and political institutions serve as the broad context within which interjurisdictional administrative conjunction occurs. Elected officials, however, ordinarily have little to do with conjunction.
- H-2-c. When the practices of conjunction need to be formalized and ratified they are taken to jurisdictional political leaders for approval.
- H-3-a. Interjurisdictional conjunction is a mostly administrative phenomenon.
- H-3-b. Functional professionals practice administrative conjunction based on legitimating assumptions of expertise, knowledge, shared beliefs, causal beliefs, and sense making.
- H-3-c. Functional professionals will engage in interjurisdictional administrative conjunction to address problems that cannot be jurisdictionally contained, and to, thereby, reduce collective uncertainty.
- H-3-d. Public management professionals work for their jurisdictions. Yet, from the perspective of their policy specializations, they appear to serve a larger, inchoate public.
- H-3-e. Public management professionals engaged in conjunction appear to practice a form of “representation” of a generalized “public interest” extending well beyond their jurisdictions.
- H-3-f. Jurisdictional professionals engage in administrative conjunction “in the shadow of their jurisdictional hierarchies,” foregoing time given to their hierarchies for time given to conjunction.
- H-4-a. Conjunction is almost completely functional, contained within semiautonomous policy subject matters.
- H-4-b. Jurisdictional functional professionals will engage in multijurisdictional conjunction more than they will engage in crossfunctional coordination within their jurisdictions.
- H-5-a. Conjunction allows officials to preserve jurisdictional boundaries while attempting to ameliorate problems that cannot be jurisdictionally contained.
- H-5-b. Conjunction leaves in place the inequities associated with jurisdictional boundaries.
- H-6-a. Subgovernment can be induced to practice administrative conjunction by central governments.

Conjunction is primarily an administrative activity carried on by like-minded institutional professionals. These professionals are functional specialists practicing in discrete subject matter or policy arenas. Their day-to-day agency or institutional work falls within the long standing descriptions of such work found in contemporary public administration theory (see Graham and Hays 1993; Hood and Jackson 1991; Rainey and Steinbauer 1999). Their conjunction activities are a surprisingly large part of their work, usually described as taking between 10 and 25% of their time. Administrative conjunction of the sort described here can be understood as forms of linking-pin functions (Likert 1967) in loosely-coupled systems. The tightness or looseness of the coupling depends on the form of conjunction—a formally negotiated interlocal agreement constituting tight coupling; a series of monthly meetings augmented by an email listserv constituting loose coupling. However coupled, most of these forms of conjunction were organized and operated voluntarily by public service professionals.

It appears that there is little problem of motivation in the nonhierarchical world of conjunction, contrary to the speculation of Milgrom and Roberts (1990). Evidently, public service professionals do not require either hierarchy or markets to supply motivation to engage in conjunction.

It appears that transaction costs are kept extremely low in conjunction. There are no layers. Authority is replaced by voluntary cooperation. This matches Agranoff and McGuire's findings in their study of economic development cooperation in cities: “No longer dependent on traditional command and control mechanisms of hierarchy, public managers find themselves taking advantage of scope and scale without the redundancy and rising costs that often follow in the wake of bureaucracy” (1998, 85). There are, however, transaction costs on jurisdictional time given to conjunction, and these costs must be absorbed by the jurisdictions.

While administrative conjunctions are nonhierarchical, their formation and maintenance require hierarchies to support the actors in the conjunctions. There cannot be administrative conjunction without institutions. Conjunctions appear to be rather like light-weight bridges; they require solid grounding at each end. And, while like light-weight bridges, individual conjunctions have a limited carrying capacity, many light-weight bridges between institutions in, say, public work, can combine to make a surprisingly strong and enduring network.

Markets and market theory do not appear to explain the interjurisdictional behavior of actors in conjunctions. It appears that instincts to cooperate (learned and innate) do explain, at least in part, the behavior of actors in conjunctions (Axelrod 1984; Chisolm 1989; Scharpf 1993). It further appears that the values and beliefs of public service professionals do more to explain metropolitan administrative conjunction than do theories of competition. Market and competition models are, then, less useful than cooperation models (Brehm and Gates 1997; cf., Mashaw 1997).

Without doubt, the most surprising thing I found while researching Kansas City is the absence of political influence in the activities of metropolitan conjunctions. Speaker O'Neill's adage that “All politics is local,” might

account for political behavior in the jurisdictions. There are few incentives for elected officials to spend much energy or political capital in the interest of nonconstituents who cannot vote for them. My research suggests that traditional forms of political representation are rooted in formal political jurisdictions, whereas forms of administrative "representation" are evidently associated with professional concepts of the public interest and a sense of representing an inchoate public beyond the boundaries of one jurisdiction. Insofar as there is a regional polity, then, it is an administrative polity.

These points should be taken with some caution. It is unlikely that there could be an ongoing healthy inter-jurisdictional polity and administrative conjunction if its interests and purposes were distinctly at odds with the regime values of the participating jurisdictions and their political leaders.

There is good evidence that metropolitan conjunction strengthens and reinforces the departments, policy subject matters, and "silo" autonomy found within jurisdiction hierarchies. It is difficult to achieve interdepartmental coordination and cooperation within a jurisdiction, and it is just as difficult to achieve such cooperation and coordination in a conjunction or between conjunctions.

If my theory of public administrative conjunction is accurate, and if my findings about metropolitan areas are generalizable, it appears that an effective public administration is the key to interjurisdictional cooperation and to the amelioration of the problems of jurisdictional fragmentation and the disarticulation of the state.

## A Repositioned Public Administration

The development of both network theory and governance theory, as well as the little theory of administrative conjunction, all within the general framework of in-

stitutionalism, form the basis of the repositioning of public administration as a field in political science. It is the public administration field in political science that is responding to the modern challenges of high fragmentation and the disarticulation of the state. It is public administration that is responding to structural and contextual dynamics—the problems of jurisdictions and system disorder, unpredictability, and instability. It is no surprise, therefore, that theories which explain behavior under such circumstances come from modern public administration. These theories have much less to do with markets, competition, and individual choice, and more to do with theories of institutions and forms of natural and voluntary cooperation. Most of the contemporary models of public administration are built on assumptions of institution building, cooperation, productivity, structure, and leadership. In sum, public administration has changed to such an extent as to have repositioned itself in political science.

Perhaps the most interesting point here is that public administration now has important things to say to political science. If the hypotheses of which the theory of administrative conjunction are comprised are empirically replicable, there are very important implications for political science. In their simplest form, these hypotheses suggest that public administration is naturally interjurisdictional, networked, and comfortable in the new world of governance. Politics, when practiced in our traditional democratic institutions, is deeply jurisdictional and jurisdictionally contained. In these jurisdictional capsules, politics is competitive and preoccupied with the near-at-hand clash of interests and winners and losers. It is, therefore, public administration that has become the politics of the adaptation of public institutions to high fragmentation and to the disarticulation of the state.

---

## Notes

1. Several of the ideas in this section trace to Mark Huddleston (forthcoming), Luke and Caiden (1989), and Caiden (1994).
2. This research consisted of open-ended face-to-face and telephone interviews with the heads (chief, librarian, manager, etc.) of each of the

primary departments of each of the jurisdictions in greater Kansas City. The elected leaders of the jurisdictions of greater Kansas City were also interviewed. The detailed findings of this research are reported in Frederickson (1997).

---

## References

- Agranoff, Robert, and Michael McGuire. 1998. "Multinetwork Management: Collaboration and the Hollow State in Local Economic Policy." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 8:67-91.
- Axelrod, Robert. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bardach, Eugene, and Cara Lesser. 1996. "Accountability in Human Service Collaboratives—For What? And To Whom?" *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 6:197-224.
- Bozeman, Barry. 1987. *All Organizations Are Public: Bridging Public and Private Organizational Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brehm, John, and Scott Gates. 1997. *Working, Shirking and Sabotage: Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Burns, Nancy. 1994. *The Formation of American Local Governments*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caiden, Gerald A. 1994. "Globalizing the Theory and Practice of Public Administration." In *Public Administration in the Global Village*, ed. Jean-Claude Garcia-Zamor and Renu Khator. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Chisold, Donald. 1989. *Coordination without Hierarchy: Informal Structures in Multiorganizational Systems*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cleveland, Harlan. 1972. *The Future Executive*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Coase, Ronald H. 1960. "The Problem of Social Cost." *Journal of Law and Economics* 3:1-44.
- Cohen, Michael and James March. 1986. *Ambiguity and Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Frederickson, H. George. 1997a. "Beyond the City: Finding Metropolitan Governance in America." Presented at the annual meeting of the National Academy of Public Administration, Duke University, Durham, NC.
- . 1997b. *The Spirit of Public Administration*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Gilmour, Robert S., and Alexis A. Halley. 1994. *Who Makes Public Policy: The Struggle for Control between Congress and the Executive*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House.
- Graham, Cole Blease, and Steven W. Hays. 1993. *Managing the Public Organization*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Haas, Ernst B. 1964. *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Haas, Peter M. 1990. *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1992. "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination." *International Organization* 46:1-35.
- Hammond, Thomas H. 1993. "Toward a General Theory of Hierarchy: Books, Bureaucrats, Baseball Tournaments, and the Administrative Structure of the Nation-State." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 3:120-45.
- . 1996. "Formal Theory and Institutions of Governance." *Governance* 9:107-85.
- , and Jack H. Knott. 1996. "Who Controls the Bureaucracy? Presidential Power, Congressional Dominance, Legal Constraints, and Bureaucratic Autonomy in a Model of Multi-Institutional Policy Making." *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization* 12:121-68.
- . 1999. "Political Institutions, Public Management, and Policy Choice." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9: 33-85.
- Hanf, Kenneth I. 1994. *The International Context of Environmental Management from the Negotiating Table to the Shop Floor*. Breukelen, Netherlands: Nijenrood University Press.
- Harsanyi, John C. 1977. *Rational Behavior and Bargaining Equilibrium in Games and Social Situations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holden, Mathew Jr. 1964. "The Governance of the Metropolis as a Problem in Diplomacy." *The Journal of Politics* 26:627-47.
- Hood, Christopher, and Michael Jackson. 1991. *Administrative Argument*. Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth.
- Huddleston, Mark. Forthcoming. "Onto a Darkling Plain: Globalization and the American Public Service in the Twenty-First Century." In *The Future of Merit*, ed. James Pfiffner and Douglas Brook. Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Press and Cambridge University Press.
- Hufen, J.A.M., and A.B. Ringling, eds. 1990. *Beleidsnetwerber*. The Hague: VUGA.
- Hull, Christopher, and Benny Hjern. 1987. *Helping Small Firms Grow*. London: Groom Helm.
- Kettl, Donald F. 1988. *Government by Proxy: (Mis?)Managing Federal Programs*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- . 1993. *Sharing Power: Public Governance and Private Markets*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- LaPorte, Todd R. 1996. "Shifting Vantage and Conceptual Puzzles in Understanding Public Organization Networks." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 6:49-74.
- Light, Paul C. 1995. *Thickening Government: Federal Hierarchies and the Diffusion of Accountability*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- . 1999. *The True Size of Government*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1984. *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Likert, Rensis. 1967. *The Human Organization*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Luke, Jeffrey S., and Gerald A. Caiden, 1989. "Coping with Global Interdependence." In *Handbook of Public Administration*, ed. James L. Perry. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lynn, Laurence E. Jr. 1996. *Public Management as Art, Science and Profession*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House.
- , Carolyn Heinrich, and Carolyn J. Hill. 1999. "The Empirical Study of Governance: Theories, Models, Methods." Presented at the Workshop on Models and Methods for the Empirical Study of Governance, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.
- March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. 1984. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life." *American Political Science Review* 78:734-49.
- . 1989. *Rediscovering Institutions*. New York: Free Press.
- Mashaw, Jerry L. 1997. *Greed, Chaos and Governance: Using Public Choice to Improve Public Law*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Milgrom, Paul, and John Roberts. 1990. "Bargaining Costs, Influence Costs, and the Organization of Economic Activity." In *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, ed. James E. Alt and Kenneth A. Shemple. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Milward, Brinton H. 1994. "Nonprofit Contracting and the Hollow State." *Public Administration Review* 54:1-73.
- . 1996. "Symposium on the Hollow State: Capacity, Control, and Performance in Interorganizational Settings." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 6:193-96.
- Nalbandian, John. 1991. *Professionalism in Local Government: Transformations in the Roles, Responsibilities and Values of City Managers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler. 1999. *Reinventing Government*. Reading, MA Addison-Wesley.
- Ostrom, Elinor. 1987. "Institutional Arrangements for Resolving the Common Dilemma: Some Contending Approaches." In *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources*, ed. Bonnie M. McKay and James M. Acheson. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- O'Toole, Laurence J. 1993. "Multiorganizational Policy Implementation: Some Limitations and Possibilities for Rational-Choice Contributions." In *Games in Hierarchies and Networks: Analytical and Empirical Approaches to the Study of Governance Institutions*, ed. Fritz W. Scharpf. Boulder: Westview.
- . 1997. "Treating Networks Seriously: Practical and Research-Based Agendas in Public Administration." *Public Administration Review* 57:45-52.
- . 1997. "The Implications for Democracy in a Networked Bureaucratic World." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 7:443-59.
- , and Kenneth J. Meier. 1999. "Modeling the Impact of Public Management: Implications of Structural Content." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.
- Ouchi, William C. 1984. *The M-Form Society: How American Teamwork Can Capture the Competitive Edge*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Peters, B. Guy. 1998. "Governance without Government? Rethinking Public Administration." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 8:223-43.
- Powell, Walter W. 1990. "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization." In *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 12, ed. B. Staw and L. Cummings. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- , and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds. 1991. *The New Institutionalism and Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rainey, Hal, and Paula Steinbauer. 1999. "Galloping Elephants: Developing Elements of a Theory of Effective Government Organizations." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9:1-32.
- Sable, Charles F. 1993. "Constitutional Ordering in Historical Context." In *Games in Hierarchies and Networks: Analytical and Empirical Approaches to the Study of Governance Institutions*, ed. Fritz W. Scharpf. Boulder: Westview.
- Salamon, Lester M., ed. 1989. *Beyond Privatization: The Tasks of Government Action*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Scharpf, Fritz W. 1977. "Does Organization Matter? Task Structure and Interaction in the Ministerial Bureaucracy." *Organization and Administration Science* 8:149-168.
- . 1989. "Decision Rules, Decision Styles, and Policy Choices." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1(2): 149-76.
- . 1993. "Coordination in Hierarchies and Networks." In *Games in Hierarchies and Networks: Analytical and Empirical Approaches to the Study of Governance Institutions*, Fritz W. Scharpf. Boulder: Westview.
- Schattschneider, E.E. 1960. *The Semi-Sovereign People*. New York.
- Strange, S. 1996. *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, Craig W. 1997. "Public Management as Interagency Cooperation: Testing Epistemic Community Theory at the Domestic Level." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 7:221-46.
- Thompson, James D. 1967. *Organizations in Action*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weaver, R. Kent, and Bert A. Rockman, eds. 1993. *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Weiss, Janet. 1990. "Control in School Organizations: Theoretical Perspectives." In *Choice and Control in American Education*, ed. William H. Clune and John F. Witte. New York: Falmer.
- Williamson, Oliver E. 1985. *Markets and Hierarchies*. New York: Free Press.
- Wilson, James Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books.