The Ups and Downs of Bureaucratic Organization

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Abstract

Why do democracies give birth to bureaucracies and bureaucrats? How and why has a seemingly undesirable and unviable organizational form weathered relentless criticism over many years and is possibly experiencing a renaissance? Normative democratic theory, theories of formal organizations, and Weber's ideas are used for exploring de-bureaucratization efforts since the late 1970s and the most recent decade's rediscovery of bureaucracy. One lesson is that there has not been a monotonic development towards bureaucratization, as argued by Weber, or de-bureaucratization, as argued by his critics. Several normative and organizational components have co-existed. Yet the significance of each component and their relationships has varied over time. While elements of a theoretical framework are suggested, no great optimism for a comprehensive theory of bureaucratization and de-bureaucratization is offered. Institutions, agency, and macro forces all matter, but there is no agreement regarding under which conditions one factor matters more than the others.

The Puzzle

 "The bureaucracy" has faced lasting and relentless criticism for being ill-suited to cope with the tasks, purposes, and circumstances of contemporary democracies. It is too big, powerful, hierarchical, rule-bound, indifferent to results, inefficient, lazy, incompetent, wasteful, inflexible, unaccountable, inhumane, and harmful for democracy, economic efficiency and individual freedom. Bureaucratic organization belongs to a simple, legalistic and authoritarian society. It is incompatible with complex, dynamic and individualistic societies. The end of the era of bureaucracy has been observed, predicted, or prescribed. It is forecast to be replaced by the era of enterprise, market- or network organization, and non-legal, "soft" means of governance. Some see a paradigmatic shift as inevitable and irreversible. Others demand radical administrative reforms.[1]

Why, then, do democracies give birth to bureaucracies and bureaucrats? Why has rational administration been seen as identical to bureaucratically organized administration? How and why has a seemingly undesirable and unviable organizational arrangement been able to weather the criticism and predictions of its demise over so many years and is possibly experiencing a renaissance?

The aim of this paper is to make sense of this puzzle by exploring bureaucracy as a specific way of organizing public administration in democratic societies. Through what processes and under what conditions is administrative organization likely to come close to the Weberian ideal type?

First, the uneasy relationship between democracy and bureaucracy is addressed. Normative democratic theory is explored as a guide to administrative design, and theories of formal organizations are used to provide alternative frameworks for exploring administrative change.

Second, Weber's ideas about the characteristics, antecedents and consequences of bureaucratic organization are re-examined. While bureaucracy is often portrayed as the archetype of a unitary organization, this paper interprets its internal organization as composite, organized according to competing principles and authority claims based upon formal position, rules, and knowledge. Furthermore, bureaucracy is seen as part of a larger institutional order, not a closed system. Its relations with the public at large are channeled through three gate-keeping

institutions, implying that administrative processes are insulated from inappropriate influences of individual citizens, organized socio-economic interests, and elected politicians.

The next two sections address the efforts of de-bureaucratization and the introduction of "post-bureaucratic forms" such as markets and networks since the late 1970s and the most recent decade's "post-New Public Management" reforms with a rediscovery of bureaucracy. The following section then asks: What can three decades of administrative reform tell us about the direction, content, mechanisms, and determinants of administrative change? Finally, the paper returns to the puzzle and the challenge of understanding the shifting significance of bureaucratic organization when administrative change is part of a larger reordering of inter-institutional relations, including the proper role of democratic government and politics in society and the role of commercial and civil society actors in public administration and democratic governing.

Bureaucracy And Democracy

"Bureaucracy" and "democracy" imply norms for arranging authority and power that enable and constrain actors differently, and it is commonplace to view bureaucracy as a functional necessity for and danger to democracy. What kind of administrative organization does normative democratic theory prescribe?

An ambiguous guide

Normative democratic theory has little to say about the organization of public administration. Democratic norms require that the demos, as a community of equal, self-ruling citizens, have the last say when it comes to how society is organized and governed. Legitimacy depends on informed popular support for common institutions, and public administration is an instrument for carrying out the will of the people. The task is to make democracy work through the preparation, implementation and enforcement of laws and policies (Waldo 1948). Democratic theory, however, does not prescribe what administrative arrangement will support a sustainable democratic development and make it possible to exploit the capabilities and expertise of bureaucrats without losing democratic control.

There are competing understandings of the proper organization of public administration within a constitutional-, representative-, and direct democracy framework. "Government *by* the people" implies citizens' direct participation. Affected organized interests are also assumed to have a right to participate in administrative processes, and "workplace democracy" legitimates that employees have a say. "Government *for* the people" implies responsiveness to citizens' demands and needs. There is rational problem solving, good service and equal treatment of citizens without their direct participation.

To make sense of the ups and downs of bureaucratic organization, students of administration have to take into account *variation* in the normative criteria facing public administration in different time periods, political systems, and policy areas. Administrators are rarely provided with clear and stable criteria for success. They are exposed to the demands from democratically elected governments; the *Rechtstaat's* requirements of a neutral and impartial administration, due process and the rule of law; professional claims for autonomy based on expertise; and organized client groups' and individuals' expectations that their welfare will be looked after.

Administrative dynamics

While normative democratic theory is an ambiguous guide to administrative design, theories of formal organizations suggest that administrative development reflects the comparative performance of alternative forms, shifts in cultural commitments to principles of organization, and changing power distributions.

Functional performance. Within this framework, formal organization is a means of governing administrative behavior and performance, and organizational forms flourish when they provide better solutions than their alternatives (Goodin 1996, Stinchcombe 2001). Administrative development is driven by comparative performance in terms of changing definitions of the common good, including the sometimes "confusing shifts in the use of government" (Gauss 1947: 5). Administrative structures are adapted to the typical problems and opportunities facing democracies through processes such as experiential learning and rational adaptation, or competitive selection.

Cultural prescriptions and normative validity. Within this framework, formal organizations are infused with value beyond the relevant technical requirements (Selznick

1957: 17). Institutions are carriers of cultural prescriptions and expectations, and an organizational form thrives when it "matches" general templates and principles of legitimate organization in a culture (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Citizens have preferences over organizational forms as well as substantive outcomes, and the two do not necessarily correlate positively. Political ideologies express trust in, and fear of, different institutions, actors and resources, different views about the desirable institutional balance and how different resources should be regulated. Some are afraid of majority institutions, numbers and majority power; others fear administrations and bureaucratic and technocratic power, courts and the power of judges, science-based institutions and expert power, corporative arrangements and organizational power, or markets and monetary power. Such convictions can be relatively unaffected by empirical evidence.

Power distributions. Within this framework, conflict over desired performance and normative standards are endogenous parts of administrative life (Crozier 1964). Reinterpretation of the role of public administration involves a power struggle (Bendix 1960: 431,433), and criticism is part of a conflict over organizational and normative principles, world views, symbols, and the institutional identity and power of public administration (Brunsson and Olsen 1998). The waxing and waning of bureaucratic organization reflects shifting power relations, bringing in new definitions of problems, normative standards, and organizational solutions.

At issue is what are the functional capabilities and limitations of bureaucratic organization, its normative attractiveness, and its power basis (who is likely to support bureaucratization). In the literature these issues are embedded in three broad interpretative perspectives: A societal perspective emphasizing macro societal forces; an actor perspective focusing upon the choices made by identifiable actors; and an institutional perspective assuming that administrative institutions and political orders have some autonomy and do not adapt easily to environmental change or deliberate reform efforts. Institutions, however, have their own dynamics, among other things due to intra- and inter-institutional tensions between normative and organizational principles. Like other institutions, public administration develops around balancing acts in an effort to cope with interdependencies and conflicts, and sudden and radical change occurs most likely in situations of performance crises (March and Olsen 1989, 2006

a,b). Approaching the ups and downs of bureaucratic organization, however, requires a more detailed discussion of Weber's ideas.

Composite Organization with three Gate-Keepers

"Bureaucracy" as an ideal type signifies a distinct organizational setting, the bureau or office: formalized, rule-bound hierarchical authority, standardization, and specialization with a clear functional division of labor and demarcation of jurisdiction. Bureaucracy also refers to a professional, full-time administrative staff with life-long employment, organized careers, salaries and pensions, appointed to office and promoted on the basis of formal education, merit and tenure, with legal protection against discretionary dismissal (Weber 1978: 971-2). The exercise of public authority and resources is tied to the office and what is required for the discharge of one's duties (Weber 1978: 956). Bureaucrats follow rules and orders voluntarily because they are given by officeholders as trustees of a legitimate and impersonal rational-legal order. The role, not the person, is the basic unit. *Amtstreue* is a specific duty and loyalty to the purpose of the office (Weber 1978: 212-16, 959).

Weber emphasized the technical superiority and the procedural rationality of bureaucracy. Bureaucratic structure is assumed to contribute to unity and coordination, precision and speed, predictability, obedience, loyalty, impartiality, reduction of costs, institutionalized memory and knowledge of files, and continuity across changes in government. Weber underscored how important it is that administrators are socialized into an ethos of rule following; yet he deplored the mentality bureaucracy select and form, a personality assumed to hamper initiative and creative thinking and cultivate obedience and obsessive rule-following and risk-avoidance (Gerth and Wright Mills 1970: 50, Weber 1978: 987-90).

Nevertheless, bureaucracy is not a tool for executing arbitrary commands, to be assessed on the basis of its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving pre-determined purposes. The bureaucracy is an institution with a raison d'être of its own, organizational and normative principles with intrinsic value, and some degree of autonomy and legitimate non-adaptation to leaders' orders and environmental demands. Legitimacy is based on constitutional principles, rule of law and due process, and impartial expertise, and is an expression of society's cultural values and long-term commitment to a *Rechtsstaat*, the principle of separation of powers and procedural rationality, and enlightened, knowledge-based government, as ways of increasing predictability,

pacifying conflict, and coping with power-differentials in society. The bureaucracy's performance is assessed deontologically, based on the validity of the behavioral codes and the principles of reason and morals upon which it is founded as an institution.

From this perspective, the bureaucrat is the servant and guardian of legal and professional rules and a constitutional order, not of the rulers. Bureaucrats are supposed to prepare and implement laws impartially and with integrity, based upon neutral competence. They are imagined to use their professional expertise and experience to illuminate all aspects of public policies, "speak truth to power", and be insensitive to immediate political and economic expediency. In applying the law to individual cases, public administration is to be legally insulated from day-to-day interference by elected politicians, political parties, organized interests and individual citizens (also Wilson 1887: 214, 217). Regard for clientele and societal interests is supposed to be channeled into administrative processes through legislatures and courts.

Accordingly, Weberian bureaucracy is a composite internal organization based on three possibly competing principles, and it is part of a larger institutional order in which the legislature, the courts, and the University are gatekeepers that regulate relations between the bureaucracy and the public. *Hierarchical* authority is based upon formal position and the electoral mandate given by citizens at the ballot box and expressed through legislative supremacy and majority government. Binding authority is claimed through a fourfold, rule-bound hierarchical relationship: between citizens and elected representatives, democratic legislation and administration, within administration, and between administration and citizens as subjects as well as authors of law. *Rule-based* authority is embedded in constitutions, *Rechtsstaat* principles and laws authored by the legislature and interpreted by the courts. *Expert* authority is based on professional, impartial and non-partisan knowledge and principles of enlightened government. Historically, making educational certificates and individual merit the basis for recruitment to administrative office represented a break with the direct link between the exercise of administrative and judicial authority and social status, property, kinship, and inherited privilege. Recruitment was formally insulated from social structure and the tie also became less tightly coupled in practice (Eisenstadt 1964: 237, 243, Bendix 1977: 128, 131, 138).

Weber's ideal type is embedded in a set of ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between organizational characteristics and administrative behavior, mentality, performance and change. A core assumption is that rationality is an attribute of organizational structure and the procedures used to reach an outcome, and not of the outcome itself. The bureaucrats' willingness and capacity to follow orders and rules depend on a variety of mechanisms.

Motivation is a result of material incentives inherent in life-long careers, as well as socialization and habituation. Intellectual and moral education at the University and the workplace is also supported by general cultural beliefs. Weber argued that relatively few cultural norms and identifications are shared in modern society because rationalization reduces the importance of affiliation and membership as identity markers. Modernity creates individualism and makes the decline of social solidarity inevitable (Bendix 1977: 168). The system of rational-legal authority and rules can nevertheless be explained and justified by social norms, and the wider culture is assumed to breed obedient adjustment to the rational-legal order in officials and subjects. Therefore, accustomed rules and regulations will survive even without written rules (Weber 1978: 953-4, 988).

The bureaucrats' *capacity* to follow formal rules, professional and ethical codes depends not only on their qualifications and orientations but also on the leaders' ability to give direction and the continuous availability of resources. Bureaucratization goes hand-in-hand with the centralization of resources (Weber 1978: 980), but elected leaders may lack the authority, knowledge and resources to direct and control administration.

Weber saw the emergence and growth of bureaucracy as resulting from many forces. Bureaucratization was an inevitable part of a historical trend towards rationalization – *Entzauberung* – of life in the West, and Weber argued that bureaucracy would be the dominant form of human organization in the modern world. Nevertheless, he denied that history follows a general law of development and can be constructed in terms of "unilinear" evolution or "cycles." He saw bureaucratic structure as malleable and a rationally designed tool. The legal and administrative order is subject to change by legislation, but the bureaucracy is also indispensable, powerful and difficult to control –even indestructible in the face of radical change in society. While bureaucratic organization and mass democracy developed together, there is an enduring struggle between political leadership and bureaucrats. The bureaucracy

protects its identity and structures against the outside, and the political "master" finds himself in the position of a dilettante facing the expert. The "official secret" is the invention of bureaucracy, which "welcomes a poorly informed and hence a powerless parliament" (Weber 1978: 991-2). There could be changes in the control of bureaucracy, however, as beliefs in its legitimacy are modified through human deliberation, reason-giving and political struggle (Gerth and Wright Mills 1970: 51, Weber 1978: 223, 978, 1002).

As an ideal-type, bureaucracy has relatively clear characteristics, preconditions and effects. Yet Weber was well aware that practice at best approximates the ideal type. In the real world there are fluid and overlapping organizational principles, and the functioning, consequences, emergence, and growth of bureaucracy depend on many factors.

Weber observed the *possibility* that beliefs in a legitimate order will govern organized action and that human behavior will be guided by utility, affinity and traditions. Incentives and socialization mechanisms are not perfect, and domination based on formal authority and the validity of an order is defined as questions of degree and probabilities. Elected leaders may provide complex and ambiguous compromises rather than clear rules and purposes. The distinction between politics and administration may be hard to uphold in practice, and a messy mix of rules and means-end calculations may produce multiple and contradictory outcomes. Applying impartial expertise is important, but professionalization leads to claims for professional discretion and less reliance upon formal rules and hierarchical command. There is also a tension between the equity sought by universal rules and by giving attention to the particularities of the case to be decided. Bureaucratization is stimulated by the quantitative and qualitative expansion of administrative tasks, but its direction and the reasons that occasioned it can vary widely (Bendix 1977: 171, Weber 1978: 971).

De-bureaucratization, then, implies erosion of the characteristics of bureaucratic organization – rules, hierarchy, independent expertise and three gate-keeping institutions - so that administrative behavior and outcomes are governed by other influences.

De-Bureaucratization as opening up to Society

Since the end of the 1970s, de-bureaucratization has been high on the agenda of international organizations and democratic states. Efforts to promote "post-bureaucratic" forms have focused

upon opening up public administration to society, beyond the traditional gatekeeping institutions, and changing the relations between societal institutions. A paradigmatic shift from administration and government through bureaucracies to competitive markets and participatory policy networks has been diagnosed or prescribed (Dunleavy and Hood 1994), and the transformation has been interpreted as an "inevitable shift" toward a more advanced administration with a convergence of administrative forms, if not globally then at least among OECD countries (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

Students of formal organizations have also presented postmodern public administration as "the negation of Weber's bureaucracy" (Bogason 2005: 237). The influence of law on public administration has been reduced (Feldman 2003: 281, 283), and bureaucratic organization has been challenged by a fundamental transformation in organizational practices. Bureaucracy is still relevant, but its influence is steadily waning. Its external organizational boundaries are breaking down, and flat, flexible and self-designing forms are emerging (Clegg and Hardy 1996: 9, Burrell 1996: 646, Goldsmith and Eggers 2004: 8, Bogason 2005).

The criticism of bureaucratic organization, the criteria used to diagnose its failures, and the attributed implications of de-bureaucratization have varied. The criticism also has different roots – from the left-leaning, anti-authoritarian culture with reduced trust in established institutions and professional expertise during the 1960s, to the neo-liberal and conservative criticism of budget deficits and economic performance, to the "reinventing government" movement searching for a third way between bureaucracy and market. Some have prescribed the rolling back of the state, based upon a general skepticism about the possibility and desirability of government shaping society. Others have aimed at making public administration more transparent and responsive to citizens' expectations and demands by advocating direct participation in administrative processes and public–private partnerships.

The reform efforts have in common that they portray administrative change as part of the rethinking and reforming of the power balance between institutions based upon a decline in confidence in institutions of democracy, such as legislatures and political parties. Efforts to open up public administration to society have been interpreted as a "reconquest of political authority by societal actors" (Andersen and Burns 1996: 228). These efforts have given priority to results rather than formal rules, challenged the political center and the primacy of the

electoral channel between society and government, rejected the idea of consensual, impartial expertise, and claimed a need for counter-expertise to public administration.

Results, not formal rules

New Public Management (NPM) reforms involve both aspirations to shrink the public sector and limit the role of government in society and economy and to improve the control over public administration through market competition and price systems. There is a quest for economy and efficiency and for "serving the economy better" (OECD 1991). The key ideas are rooted in neo-classical market economics and private management, not in democratic theory. Market-and-management reforms celebrate individualism, consumer sovereignty and customer-driven services. The defining activity is service provision, and legitimacy is based on substantive performance and cost efficiency rather than compliance with formal rules and procedures. The main features are well known: privatization, deregulation, devolution of authority, commercialization, outsourcing, joint ventures, partnerships with private business, and management by contract and competitive tendering. There are also ideas about strengthening the capacity for developing strategy, accountability and control; yet the special nature of the public sector is denied. Because the private sector can deliver any service, it is less certain what government ought to do (Kettl 1995: 51).

Administrative change is portrayed as improvement, "best practice", "rightsizing", and better value for the money (OECD 1991, 1995). It is possible to have public administration that costs less and performs better by introducing business-like practices and organization. In "the age of enterprise" (Courpasson and Reed 2004) administration has to adapt to a globalized economy and market competition (World Bank 1991: 38). Change follows from efficient adaptation to environmental dictates, including customers' demands, or from competitive selection. It is assumed that bureaucracy inhibits innovation and adaptation, and the aim is to enhance flexibility by liberating market entrepreneurs and "letting the managers manage".

NPM prescribes administrative agencies as organizations with clear tasks, goals, resources, and borders, and as responsible for identifiable results. Responsiveness and accountability imply the ability to discover and accommodate market signals. Market actors and consumers are rational actors. The population is a collection of customers and clients focused on individual benefits, who have a primarily commercial rather than political relationship to government.

Institutional frameworks and their incentive structures rather than individual actors are blamed for poor performance, a view also found among network enthusiasts.

Citizens' participation, not a dominant center

The network criticism of bureaucracy represents a quest for democratic legitimacy, a move away from centralized, hierarchical government and towards governance by networks characterized by long-term commitments, trust and reciprocity, with civil society organizations as a link between society and government (Powell 1990, O'Toole 1997, Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1999, Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, Rhodes 2006) Appeals are made to democratic ideology and issues of authority and power, demanding a corrective to the conventional view of politics and government as centered on formal-legal institutions (Marinetto 2003: 598-99) and "the charade of democratic accountability given by the current electoral system" (Brereton and Temple 1999: 466).

The organization of public administration reflects constellations of power in society. Weberian style legitimacy through intra-administrative chains of hierarchical responsibility is increasingly problematic (Hofmann and Türk 2006: 112), and the vision of administration organized according to a single scheme and serving a single common authority is difficult to uphold (Joerges 2002: 21). Citizens are mobilized in civil society and directly in administrative processes. Popular elections and majority government are not the only source of legitimacy, and no single political center can legitimately claim to represent the public and common good. Neither elected leaders nor administrators can compel compliance by virtue of their formal position. The reach of public administration has been expanded. However, better, rather than less, government implies a state that serves and enables rather than "steers" society (Rhodes 2006). There is participation in, rather than freedom from, administrative decision making, and public administration is both disciplined and strengthened by citizens' empowerment and social partnerships.

The ideal administration involves open, "flatter" and flexible forms of organization, unclear borders, and interaction with task environments. The institutional differentiation between public administration and politics, public and private sector, and expert and layman becomes obscure and floating. The defining activity of administration is a *political* process of mobilizing resources and building support and trust. Agencies are created, empowered and funded by the

legislature; yet when government institutions cannot concentrate power and define political ends, public administration is left with the task of building support for its mission (Meier and Hill 2005: 54). Agencies develop autonomy by building a reputation in society, using their expertise and capacity to provide valuable services and protection for citizens (Carpenter 2001, Clemens 2006: 208). There is administrative fragmentation, and administrators are "key players on different teams", overseeing and controlling each other (Lægreid and Olsen 1984).

Mixed trust in expertise

Post-modern organizational studies argue that public administration should develop dialogue and collaborative relationships, and cultivate the "self-conscious enlightened individual". Focus is placed upon human autonomy and diversity, and liberation from oppression, repression, and exploitation. The authority of experts is distrusted, and the Enlightenment-based vision of formal organizations with belief in rationalization, technocratization, scientific knowledge, strategic planning, control, centralization, and specialization is a target of criticism. "Truth", "objectivity" and "efficiency" are problematic concepts (Bogason 2005).

While most reformers do not fully share this post-modernist skepticism, market and network approaches claim that public administration does not have the expertise, skills, and capabilities needed to get the job done. They mistrust the expertise of public administration and downgrade the importance of a unified, distinct, professional and well-protected staff with life-long careers and good pension systems (Lægreid and Wise 2007). The network approach emphasizes the participatory rights of amateur citizens. The market approach and "modern human resource management" prescribe smaller and flexible staffs, horizontal recruitment, contract employment, and market-based pay for performance (Selden 2003). Increasing partisan recruitment and control over administrative careers is observed (Roban 2003: 316) as an attempt to strengthen incumbent governments' control of public administration by recruiting partisan staff.

NPM reforms have also included attempts to de-politicize decision making and protect impartial expertise against intervention and influence from politicians and powerful societal groups by delegating authority to non-majoritarian, single-purpose institutions (Christensen and Lægreid 2006). However, such efforts have involved competition among professions and

types of knowledge, and disenchantment with some experts and a belief in others has generated ups and downs of professions as well as organizational forms.

Rediscovering Bureaucracy

After decades of bureaucracy-bashing, traces of cyclical patterns in diagnosis and prescription can be discerned as the weaknesses of the "new" perspectives, and the virtues of bureaucracy have been rediscovered. Elements of the NPM have been declared "dead" as a consequence of experiences of policy disasters, performance crises and bankruptcies (Dunleavy et al. 2006). Stories about bureaucratic failure have been supplemented with stories about the problematic consequences of markets and networks in action. The old theme of how markets and price systems may create power differentials, social inequality, disintegration, and environmental damage has been resurrected. Stories of public-private networks have come to highlight accountability problems; how insight, access and influence are skewed among participants; and how embedding agencies in groups of clients they are supposed to regulate may lead to administrative co-option of client groups or the capture of public agencies by organized interests (Schick 1998, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000, Christensen and Lægreid 2007, Dibben, Wood and Roper 2004).

The enthusiasm for a universal de-bureaucratization cure and the pressure for global administrative convergence have diminished since the early 1990s. A good public administration is no longer a minimalist one. Political authorities can play a role beyond protecting property rights and enforcing contracts, and it is acknowledged that there are few answers that are right under all circumstances. Administrative reform must be matched carefully with the needs, traditions and resources of each political system (World Bank 1997, 2000, OECD 2005). After initial enthusiasm for NPM principles in former communist states in Europe, it has been suggested that each country has to find its own way and *not* copy NPM reforms from the West. The advice is to go "back to basics," that is, Weberian bureaucracies (Hesse 1998: 176). The quality of domestic bureaucracy is also seen to constitute a crucial precondition for implementation of and adaptation to European Union requirements (Hille and Knill 2006).

Reasons for rules

It is not obvious that contemporary administrators are less rule-bound than before (Hood et al. 2004: 195). "The fundamental" issues of constitutions, legalism, accountability, ethics, and the public interest are still with us (Ferlie, Lynn and Pollitt 2005). Law lies at the heart of the theory and practice of public administration as a safeguard against non-rational considerations, personal feelings and sympathies, clientelism, and corruption (Peters and Pierre 2003: Section 6). Behavioral codes are rooted in professions and customs as well as laws (Brint 1990). There is rule-breaking; yet obedience to rules is common in contemporary democracies (Piven and Cloward 2005). There is more compliance than can be explained only by narrow self-interest, and the creation and maintenance of self-enforcing contracts and credible commitments depend upon motivations other than narrowly defined self-interest (Levi and Sherman 1997).

Scandals in the private and public sector have triggered demands for legal and ethical rules and an ethos of responsibility, and the conviction that professions have been ineffectively subjected to public accountability has created an audit-explosion and new rules (Power 1994). Internationally, there has been a rule explosion and an expansion of judicial power (Ahrne and Brunsson 2004, Tate and Vallinder 1995).

The normative ideal of public administration as a tool for the preparation and implementation of laws and policies still holds a strong position in the literature. For example, rational-choice approaches usually assume a chain of legitimate hierarchical relationships of delegation and accountability between democratic principals and agents (Strøm, Müller and Bergman 2003). Habermas argues that the exercise of public authority should be oriented and legitimized by laws that citizens give themselves in discursively structured will-formation processes. Parliament and courts are the two branches of government that alone are formally empowered to deal with normative reasons. Laws ought to be implemented and prepared by a normatively neutral, technically competent and impartial bureaucracy. Social and economic power should not be converted directly into administrative power (Habermas 1996).

The renewed interest in rules has been facilitated because students of economic development have become less inclined to see markets and bureaucracies as alternatives and more interested in how competitive markets require well-functioning political and social institutions (OECD 1991, World Bank 2002). A rule-based, regulatory polity is imagined to improve economic

efficiency by creating predictability, calculability of results, and legal guarantees against arbitrariness for market actors.

The World Bank (1993: 14) interprets the East Asian economic miracle as helped by powerful, well-organized bureaucracies and competent and relatively honest staffs that are insulated from day-to-day politics. Bureaucratic organization is seen to foster economic growth in developing countries (Evans and Rauch 1999) and to contribute to poverty reduction (Henderson et al. 2003). It is associated with low corruption, partly because a longer time horizon makes quick returns in terms of corruption less likely (Evans and Rauch 1999: 757, Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2004). However, a clearly delineated system of property rights; the rule of law and a regulatory apparatus curbing fraud, anti-competitive behavior, and moral hazard; a moderately cohesive society exhibiting trust and social cooperation; and political and social institutions that mitigate risk and manage social conflicts are often absent in poor countries (Rodrik 2000: 4).

In developed countries, those who believe administrative processes are impartial and fair are more likely to accept individual unfavorable outcomes (Tyler 1990). General rules and welfare services, *not* tailor-made solutions intended to serve a special group or interest, create trust in institutions of government among citizens when implemented in an impartial and uncorrupt way (Rothstein 2003, Rothstein and Teorell 2005). The European Union also illustrates that market-building and network-building do not exclude bureaucratic organization and legal rules. The use of "soft-law" notwithstanding, the Union is based upon legal integration. Strengthening markets and networks have produced more, not fewer, rules, and the continental legalistic tradition is present everywhere in what has been called a regulating state (Majone 1996).

A lesson can also be learned from what is often thought of as the most modern and anti-bureaucratic sector. E-government and new information technologies have been assumed to give impetus to anti-bureaucracy thinking. However, computer and information technology standardize and rule-orient behavior, as do ISO standards (Kallinikos 2004). A study of 16 193 electronic messages in "KnowledgeFactory", a company started at a German university and committed to post-bureaucratic principles and organizational forms, shows that anti-bureaucratic norms, expectations, and symbols were decoupled from actual behavior. Communication practice reproduced hierarchy and office channels, even when they were

suppressed by anti-bureaucratic rhetoric and employees believed they were acting in accordance with their rhetoric (Oberg and Walgenbach 2006).

These observations dovetail with studies of organizations indicating that rules provide codes of meaning that facilitate interpretation of ambiguous worlds. They embody collective and individual roles, identities, rights, obligations, interests, values, world views and memory, and constrain the allocation of attention, standards of evaluation, priorities, perceptions, and resources (March and Olsen 2006a,b). Rules do not necessarily imply rigidity and inflexibility (March, Schultz and Zhou 2000). De-coupling from social structure makes bureaucracy flexible, adaptable and durable, as it can reshuffle and reassemble roles and rules within a repertoire of standard operating procedures to meet new contingencies (Kallinikos 2004). Bureaucratic rules also contribute to democratic equality because they are relatively blind to the wealth and other resources of the citizens they serve. In comparison, market "efficiency" is efficiency in arranging trades that are mutually acceptable, *given* initial resources; and the democratic quality of networks depends on their accessibility for groups with different values, interests, resources and capabilities (March and Olsen 1995).

Quest for democratic leadership and merit–based bureaucracy

Re-bureaucratization involves a renewed interest in democratic leadership, coordination, and accountability. For example, the OECD is concerned with how to ensure political coordination, policy consistency and a coherent public service; how to develop less ambiguous roles and responsibilities and guarantee accountability; and how to protect the public interest when highly political questions such as food safety and radioactive waste are left to autonomous experts in autonomous agencies (OECD 2002: 9, 21-22). A Swedish report searches for common purposes and basic principles for how society can be organized and governed in order to achieve a viable democratic development (SOU 2007: 10).

Political leaders have (re)discovered that they are blamed even when authority is decentralized and that "technical issues" often have significant political implications. In the literature it is observed that de-regulation, devolution, single-purpose organizations, and monitoring and evaluation of activities and results have created fragmentation. These tendencies, in turn, have generated demands for better integrated systems of government with stronger coordination capacity. A "second generation" of post-NPM reforms has changed the focus to the need for a

"reassertion of the center", "whole-of-government" and "joined-up government" (Peters 2004, Christensen and Lægreid 2006, 2007). Re-centralizing resources and power, however, may facilitate but not guarantee re-bureaucratization.

There is also a revival of the assumption that public administration has become too partisan as "can-do" attitudes have become stronger and the independent guardian role of "enlightened administration" has been weakened, and that good government requires well-trained, full-time professional administrators to prepare policies and put them into effect. For example, independent-expertise values have been activated as part of the effort to fight nepotism in Mediterranean counties with limited professional traditions (Pollitt, Van Thiel and Homburg 2007). De-professionalization and politicization of public administration, emphasizing political affiliation and loyalty to the current government, has been seen to have significant costs in terms of public administration's ability to serve future governments and society at large (Suleiman 2003). Furthermore, there has been a concern about how democratic government may require not only citizen participation in administrative processes, but also institutions that make continuous participation unnecessary because they work with integrity in predictable ways (Olsen 2003b).

Which expertise is needed for the purpose of office, however, is contested. Economic and management ideas underlying de-bureaucratization have been challenged by other types of knowledge, and an interesting aspect of recent reforms is that they aspire to work on peoples' identities and minds. They aim at coordination by building a community with an ethos of public service, codes of behavior and trust, rather than relying solely on external incentives, contracts and external monitoring (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). While economic frameworks portray the challenge as getting the incentives right, the "new" approach reopens issues about how different forms of government and organization can foster desirable moral and intellectual qualities. In which organizational settings is a sense of administrative identity and role learned, lost and redefined? How and where are administrators transformed into law-abiding and rule-following officeholders and professionals with an ethos of self-discipline, impartiality and integrity; self-interested utility maximizing actors; or consensus- and compromise participants oriented towards the policy networks they participate in?

In public administration there have been cycles of trust in the control of behavior through manipulation of incentive structures and individual cost-benefit calculations, and trust in internalized willingness to act in accordance with culturally defined rules of appropriateness, institutionalized purposes, professional standards, and democratic values. Historically, the two have interacted and their relative importance have changed over time and varied across institutional settings (deLeon 2003). Still, recent administrative reforms have not been concerned with the relationship to institutions of higher education, and reforms of universities have not taken much interest in the University as a democratic training ground for bureaucrats, political leaders, commercial actors, and citizens. Reforms have given priority to putting universities in the service of economic competitiveness and growth, and largely ignored possible impacts upon the preparation for the duties of office and public life (Maassen and Olsen 2007).

The Main Lesson: Shifting Mixes

Making sense of the ups and downs of bureaucracy is complicated because historically it has been difficult to get a good measure of the degree to which bureaucratic administration has become the prevailing pattern (Bendix 1977: 138-9). One reason may be the composite nature of bureaucratic organization, in which change along different dimensions is not always positively correlated (Eisenstadt 1959). Another reason may be that large-scale reform efforts are multi-faceted and based on partly contradictory aims and ideas. Drawing lessons about the direction and content of administrative development is also problematic because reform implies intervention in established institutional arrangements, and because at the end of the 1970s there were many starting points, not a single one. In addition, the precise consequences of organizational reforms have not been well documented, and they are difficult to disentangle.

Starting points

In contrast to the argument that the 'classic' public administration paradigm remained relatively undisturbed until the late 1970s (Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg 2007), this paper asserts that there were several starting points. In some parts of the world bureaucratic organization has never been implemented, and there is criticism that public administration does not meet the ideal model of a rule-bound, hierarchical, professional bureaucracy. The staff is corrupt and unreliable, incompetent, self-regarding, and uncontrollable, laws are not executed in a

competent and fair manner, and orders are not followed (Olsen 2006). In other parts of the world bureaucratic organization has never disappeared.

Furthermore, public sector reform modeled upon private enterprises and market competition is hardly new (Waldo 1948), and it is difficult to find government action that has never been taken by a private firm operating in a competitive market (Wilson 1989: 346). Nearly 40 year ago, Lowi also criticized interest group liberalism and the decline of the rule of law. He deplored that the state had shared its sovereignty in return for support; that formal procedure had been replaced by unclear goals, informal bargaining, and juridical usurpation; that due process had become "formalism" and arbitrariness "flexibility". He disapproved of policy without law, political expediency dominating principles, and clientele departments giving organized interest an institutional core. His reform program was to restore the rule of law and foster an independent, neutral and integrated, senior civil service as part of a "juridical democracy" and a constitutional state (Lowi 1969).

The significance of bureaucratic organization was also reduced by the emerging welfare state. There were new rules and judiciable rights. Nonetheless, financial instruments became more important than legal ones. There were framework laws, a growing number of competing professions, and alternative sources of policy advice. More discretion was delegated to public administration and organized interests, as numerical democracy was supplemented by "corporative pluralism" (Rokkan 1966, Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979). Public administration had to respond to competing and inconsistent societal interests and became increasingly involved in the resolution of social conflicts. With a history of corporatist arrangements, "iron triangles" and policy communities, it is difficult to see participatory networks as completely new. Arguably, reform proposals have exercised well-known controversies, and many reforms have been "repackaged versions of ideas that have been in public administration since its beginnings" (Hood 1996: 268).

Developments

Can then a new organizational pattern and shared understanding of the role of public administration be detected? Empirical studies give a complex picture. Contemporary public administration is portrayed as a core institution of modern government, staffed with professionals with their own ethos, standards, and rules of appropriate behavior. Administrators

have substantial discretion, control vast resources, exercise power, and are active participants in the preparation, formulation, implementation and enforcement of public policy. Public administration is involved in the application of law, expert advisement, service provision, policy-making, support-building and resource mobilization. Administrators deal with the population as subjects, civic-minded citizens, taxpayers, clients, and customers. They are a major point of contact between citizens and the state, a target of citizens' influence and important in creating an image of government in the popular mind. Public administration also has a constitutive dimension, explicating collective interests, protecting values like universality, equality and legal security, providing fair implementation of laws and policies, securing predictability, accountability and control and reducing corruption and favoritism (Peters and Pierre 2003). "The goal posts are constantly moving" (Minogue, Palidano and Hulme 1998: 280), and as the mix of concerns change so do conceptions of good administration and administrators (Kaufman 1956). There are periods of incremental change as well as radical contestation, de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization.

Use of markets and participatory networks has made the identity and boundaries of public administration more contested and less clear. The differences between public and private sectors have diminished. Public administration has been less insulated from external influences and societal groups. Employment security has been reduced. Yet neo-liberalism and competitive markets have not replaced mainstream ideas of public administration as a discipline (Boyne 1996), and studies of administrative reforms in Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden show that NPM principles have been added to, rather than substituted, bureaucratic principles. NPM reforms have been seen as more compatible with administrative doctrines in Anglo-American cultures than in continental Europe and Scandinavia (Christensen and Lægreid 2001, 2006, 2007). The possibility of maintaining a modernized neo-Weberian state in Europe has been suggested as a continental European and Scandinavian alternative to the largely Anglo-Saxon New Public Management (Bouckaert 2004, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg 2007).

In contrast to the currently popular idea of a post-bureaucratic world, contemporary democracies live with enduring tensions among institutional principles and behavioral logics – dilemmas to which there are no agreed-upon, enduring answers (Hood and Jackson 1991, Orren and Skowronek 2004, Olsen 2007). Even moderately complex polities use a repertoire of

overlapping, supplementary and competing forms, and it is unlikely that there will be an end to bureaucracy, markets, or participatory networks in the near future. Administrations that simultaneously have to cope with contradictory demands and standards, and balance system coordination and legitimate diversity, are likely to require more organizational complexity than a single principle can provide. What reformers present as universal diagnoses and prescriptions for public administration are in fact partial, time- and space-bound interpretations.

It is also difficult to say precisely what has happened and how different organizational structures have affected performance. Often there have been "flashy models but muddy data", problematic indicators and measurements of performance, and serious methodological problems when it comes to disentangling the effect of government and bureaucratic organization from performance (Van de Walle 2005: 14). The challenge is even more intricate when it comes to impacts on persons rather than policies and long-term rather than short-term consequences.

Theory-building requires an understanding of how formal structure can be highly consequential and also a façade or empty shell, overwhelmed by informal structures and external resources (Bendix 1960); and how significant change in administrative attention, interaction and resource allocation can occur without much change in formal structures (Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001, Olsen 2003a). Laws, rules and regulations can create predictability, consistency, equal and impersonal treatment and also be constraints on taking specific conditions in the individual case into consideration. Rule-bound hierarchy can create speedy decisions, adaptability and accountability and also create tension between formal authority and expertise. Written files and a good memory can be both a help and a hindrance to innovation. Life-long careers, offices and roles occupied by full-time, salaried staffs recruited on the basis of merit can give protection and make it possible to speak "truth to power" as well as reduce incentives for change and improvement. Rules can be an instrument of power and also a means of keeping power within boundaries. Codification and formalization of rules can be a way to live with conflict, a protection against arbitrariness, and a defense against illegitimate pressure as well as a way to institutionalize dominance. Rules can reflect the wisdom of accumulated experience in a society, historical compromises, or coercion (March and Olsen 2006b, Olsen 2006).

The main lesson is that there has not been an administrative convergence and a monotonic development towards bureaucratization, as argued by Max Weber, or de-bureaucratization, as argued by his critics. Neither has there been a simple sequence of dominant forms. Several normative and organizational components have co-existed. Yet while the components have been fairly stable, the significance of each component and their relationships has varied over time. Historically, bureaucratic organization, like other forms, has had its ups and downs. Different dimensions of bureaucratic organization have developed differently, and sometimes de-bureaucratization or re-bureaucratization has developed side by side.

Why, then, is bureaucracy so tenacious and how can the ups and downs of bureaucratic organization be understood as part of a shifting *mix* of co-existing forms?

Ups and downs of Bureaucracy

The bureaucratic puzzle may be approached from the observation that there is a loose coupling between bureaucratic rhetoric and practice, between what is said and done (March 1984). At the rhetorical level Weber has lost. "Bureaucracy" has become a vehicle for anti-government and anti-public sector sentiments, and the term is used as an invective in ideological crusades and competitions to place blame. Decoupling, in turn, feeds on a combination of strong organizational ideologies and weak data. De-bureaucratization, rhetoric notwithstanding, bureaucratic organization and success criteria are important in modern democracies. Re-bureaucratization efforts suggest that there may be some truth to the claims that bureaucratic organization has endured due to its functional necessity (Meier and Hill 2005) and "because society has yet to discover anything that works better in coordinating complex action" (Kettl 2006: 373).

Properties of the staff, their roles, and the intra- and inter-institutional frameworks within which they act affect administrative behavior, action capabilities, and outcomes. Such factors influence what is defined as a collective responsibility, how tasks are defined and solved, and which individuals and groups benefit from public programs. Yet there is no agreed-upon empirical theory that identifies the mechanisms and determinants of (de)bureaucratization and the conditions under which public administration works well according to democratic standards. There are few durable answers to questions such as: Under what conditions is

bureaucratic organization functionally efficient and democratic-normatively valid? What are the conditions for legitimate centralization of authority and power in a single center, the rule of law, and impartial expertise? Who is likely to support (de)bureaucratization? What makes majority governments accept the normative force of law and rules as binding for rulers and ruled? When will powerful groups accept public administration insulated from the direct influence of affected parties? When will professionals give priority to formal authority over professional knowledge? When will citizens accept impartial services rather than specialized personal service?

Weber provided an ideal model and a reservoir of interesting ideas. However, his ideal type is contested, and he did not give definitive answers concerning the conditions and implications of bureaucratic organization, how organizational structures are translated into behavior and consequences, and which factors strengthen or weaken the relationship between administrative structure, mentality, behavior, performance, and change. Neither did he give definitive answers concerning how human action is translated into change in administrative structures and the latitude of purposeful reform, the institutional abilities of public administration to adapt spontaneously to environmental changes, and environmental effectiveness in eliminating sub-optimal administrative institutions through competitive selection.

Holistic visions such as Weberian bureaucracy, markets, and participatory networks predict and prescribe a single dominant model. Each assumes that a context-free set of principles for organizing public administration is functionally and normatively superior. Over time the superior form replaces the others. It spreads independent of characteristics specific to a region, country, or policy sector, resulting in convergence on a dominant model. This view contrasts with the observation that administrative practice and ideas have been closely linked to the territory, borders, institutions, history, and culture of specific polities. Therefore, there is little reason to believe that a single set of principles for organizing public administration is functionally and normatively superior and that one form will replace the others and result in convergence.

Interpretations of public administration have relied upon ideas from public law, market economics, and democratic politics and, arguably, no genuine *administrative* theory is available.

Neither does this paper aspire to provide one. The aim is to suggest possible elements of a theoretical framework and discuss insights from recent administrative developments.

Administrative theory should not overtax the virtue, cognitive capacity and power of human actors (Olsen 2004). Consistent with ideas about bounded rationality, there are reasons for skepticism towards models that assume omniscient rational actors. Actors are purposeful, but they are less-than-perfect calculation machines, possibly following other forms of rationality than means-end rationality. Consistent with political pluralism, no actor can be assumed to be omnipotent. Studies of state-building have illustrated the precariousness of central political power and administrative capacity, and it remains an open question under what conditions administrative processes can be insulated from external influences (Bendix 1977: 155). Consistent with the behavioral revolution in political science, there are reasons for skepticism towards public law's conception of public administration as virtuous rule-followers. Administrative behavior and outcomes are influenced, but not determined by, formal-legal rules.

How, then, does public administration reconcile legal, economic, political, administrative and professional aspects, build organizational capacity for action, get things done, and produce consequences? Possibly, a set of *independent* constraints define what are workable solutions, or attention to problems, solutions and success-criteria is sequential and local, rather than governed by well-ordered, stable preference functions (Cyert and March 1963). In mixed polities based upon co-existing and competing normative and organizational principles, institutions may be transformed as participants learn from local experience and adjust local linkages rather than as a result of some global rationality achieved through rational choice, experiential learning, diffusion, or competitive selection. Adaptation is myopic, meandering, and "inefficient" rather than optimizing and reaching a uniquely optimal arrangement (March 1999).

Recent ups and downs of bureaucratic organization suggest that the importance of **comparative performance** for administrative development is uncertain. At the end of the 1970s there were concerns about economic performance, budget deficits, growing welfare states, implementation deficits, and inadequate adaptation to globalization and socio-economic forces. De-bureaucratization claims were consistent with the observation that bureaucracy thrives with

routine tasks and few exceptional cases, and simple, stable environments, and that bureaucratic organization is less likely to function well when facing path-breaking events, new issues and criteria of good performance, and changing power distributions – that is, in transformative periods. However, contestation over public administration was often related to public policies, electoral competition and distrust in representative democracy more than to bureaucracy as an organizational form. Bureaucratic successes and fiascos were affected by available resources and the functioning of institutions, not solely by intra-bureaucratic characteristics.

From the mid-1990s, "de-bureaucratization" was challenged by the observation that well-functioning markets required well-functioning bureaucracies. Re-bureaucratization was also facilitated by events such as 9/11 that put national security higher on the public agenda. But again, the exact comparative advantage of alternative organizational forms and the functional necessities of reforms were rarely spelled out in detail. Possibly, the more difficult it is to measure substantive results and disentangle how a specific organizational arrangement contributes to performance, the more likely that administrative development will be driven by ideological convictions rather than precise knowledge about comparative performance.

A changing **normative context** may have more explanatory power. While economic theories of de-bureaucratization are based upon an individualistic conception of public administration and democratic government, a communal conception assumes an internalized, shared belief in a legitimate order. The distinction is linked to major theoretical controversies concerning how actors, formally organized institutions, and institutional change can best be conceptualized, giving primacy to individual freedom, choice and self-fulfillment and to social belonging, obligations of office, and collective reasons and action capability.

An *individualistic* conception sees political-administrative life as organized around the interaction of a collection of autonomous individual actors pursuing prior preferences by rational calculation of future outcomes based on a logic of consequentiality (March and Olsen 1989). The individual actor is the basic unit of analysis. Rules are followed when it is in the long-run self interest of actors to do so. Left to themselves actors are likely to use public office for private gain, and the democratic challenge is to get the incentives right in order to achieve desirable outcomes and protect individual freedom (Hardin 2006). Rational compliance is promoted by specific institutional mechanisms, including institutional checks and balances, exposure to competition,

and arrangements that select a qualified pool of civil servants, reward competence, honesty and performance, credible commitments, predictable implementation, effective monitoring of performance, and sanctioning of those who break rules and contracts. The institutional design must provide a fair division of gains from cooperation and insulate bureaucrats from the demands of powerful governmental officials and societal actors (Levi and Sherman 1997). Equilibrium models see institutions as reflecting rational behavior and without any independent existence (Calvert 1995). Institutions emerge from the self-interested behavior of autonomous rational actors. They are created, maintained, and abandoned when it is efficient to do so.

A *communal* conception sees the polity as a configuration of fairly enduring institutions - rules prescribing appropriate behavior, identity and shared codes of meaning, and common resources. Formally organized institutions of government are not epiphenomena of social and economic forces or individual preferences. Behavior is governed by a "logic of appropriateness" and experience-based standard operating procedures and roles (March and Olsen 2006b). Identification is a fundamental mechanism in group integration (March and Simon 1958). Socialization into codes of right and wrong, true and false, legal and illegal make officials and citizens, as members of a community, feel an obligation to obey authority and laws produced through appropriate processes. For periods ideas that are taken for granted keep actors within shared standards of appropriate behavior and outcomes. They cope through processes of shared expectations, self-control, feed-back and mutual adjustment. Institutions may be perverted by self-interested actors, but for officeholders acting on the public's behalf, the pursuit of self interest and personal sympathies is an illegitimate use of public office.

Democracies are committed to individualism as well as community. They balance the sovereignty of the people, collective power, and majority rights with the freedom and rights of individuals and minorities, as part of creating and maintaining political integration, social cohesion and peace. De-bureaucratization and re-bureaucratization over the past decades illustrate such balancing efforts, as collectivist normative and causal beliefs and norms of appropriateness were challenged by individualistic ones, which in turn were contested by concerns that the "pendulum had swung too far" towards individualism.

Changes in the normative climate occurred along with changes in *actors, power relations and conflict patterns.* While administrative rhetoric historically has been concerned with the power position of "bureaucrats", recent de- and re-bureaucratization efforts rarely mobilized "bureaucrats" against the rest. In many countries increasing individualism led to electoral victories for parties of different political colors but with a shared belief in neo-classical economics and competitive markets, and they were supplied with ideas about how to organize public administration by think tanks and international organizations (Savoie 1994). De-bureaucratization was a shared buzzword. The "Keynesian consensus" was challenged but also defended, as commercial and civil society actors became activated.

Generally, the ups and downs of bureaucratic organization are affected by variations in social cohesiveness and conflict. Trust in institutions and actors reduce the demand for representation and participation. The more a single, shared and stable objective holds a privileged position and causal relationships are known, the more likely that decision making will be left to non-majoritarian, "guardian" institutions and experts, such as a bureaucracy. The criterion of good administration is then based on the ability to solve problems in an efficient and coherent way. When there is agreement on stable rules for coping with enduring conflicts, tasks and competence are also likely to be delegated to non-majoritarian institutions and agents. Hence, conflicts and crises are dealt with in routine, predictable ways. In periods of increasing tension and conflict there will be political mobilization (Jacobsen 1964), but the more those who control the legislative process have reliable allies among those controlling the implementation process, the less detailed the legislation (Huber and Shipan 2002).

Increasing diversity may also be conducive to rule-based government. In heterogeneous and pluralistic polities, governing can rarely assume a community of objectives. Such polities can at best develop and maintain a community of shared institutions, principles, and procedures that makes it possible to rule a divided society without undue violence. Citizens may want common rules even when they do not accept centralized discretion and power (Olsen 2007).

Finally, administrative developments have been affected by *existing institutional arrangements,* contributing to continuity as well as change. Institutions create elements of order and predictability in political-administrative life. There are "inefficiencies" in the adaptation of bureaucratic structures and processes to environmental change and deliberate reforms that

dampen changes in practices compared to changes in rhetoric, in particular when institutional identities are threatened (March and Olsen1989).

For example, global prescriptions of administrative reform have consistently been interpreted and responded to differently depending on national and sectorial institutional arrangements, resources and traditions. Countries with strong bureaucratic-legal traditions have been less likely to embrace de-bureaucratization efforts and more likely to adapt to re-bureaucratization trends. Reforms have also taken place within institution-specific frameworks – reforms of public administration, legislative bodies, courts of law and universities have been loosely coupled, if at all.

Institutions do not always favor continuity over change. The assumption that structures persist unless there are external shocks underestimates intra- and inter-institutional dynamics and sources of change. Tensions and collisions between co-existing and competing normative and organizational principles routinely create dynamics of their own. In such polities, a development or reform with hegemonic aspirations and universalization of a single principle is likely to foster criticism and countervailing forces, as illustrated by cycles of de-bureaucratization and re-bureaucratization. There are also internal aspiration-level pressures for change caused by enduring gaps between institutional practices and ideals, such as democratic government, impartial rules and objective knowledge. The "reinventing government" movement, for example, assumed that reform ideas existed within bureaucracies themselves that could be activated through a "bottom-up" process. Administrative development can furthermore be driven by explicit rules prescribing change, and in democracies institutionalization of opposition and public debate are important preconditions for change.

If these speculations are sensible, they do not invite great optimism for a comprehensive theory of bureaucratization and de-bureaucratization. The list of unanswered questions is long (Thelen 1999, March and Olsen 2006b, Olsen 2006): Which institutional characteristics favor change and which make institutions resistant to change? Which factors are likely to disrupt established patterns and processes of institutional maintenance and regeneration? What are the interrelationships between change in some (parts of) institutions and continuity in others, and between incremental adaptation and periods of radical change? Under what conditions does incremental change give a consistent and discernable direction to change and how are the

outcomes of critical junctures translated into lasting legacies? Which (parts of) political institutions are understood and controlled well enough to be designed and to achieve anticipated and desired effects?

In contrast to Weber's belief in bureaucratization as part of a grand rationalization of society and his critics' belief in the inevitable decline of bureaucracy as part of contemporary modernization, focus has been placed on the changing mix of fairly endurable and legitimate organizational forms. The aim has been to suggest possible dynamic processes of change rather than provide a list of factors that may affect the ups and downs of bureaucracy. Institutions, actors, and macro forces all matter, but there is no agreement regarding under which conditions one factor matters more than the others and how the mutual influence of partly autonomous institutions, human agency, and macro-historical forces can best be theorized.

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ENDNOTE

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