

Recent Trends in Research in Government

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~~I suppose that~~ ^{here} my problem is to point up how research in government today differs from research as we used to know it, and how a government administrator today can orient himself to these new trends. We need not be concerned with certain parts of administration that remain essentially stable. Any administrator is expected to know the structure of American government, no matter on what level he may operate. He is expected, furthermore, to know the laws governing his agency. In respect to the first kind of knowledge, the universities will continue to provide a general knowledge of government to students who will be going into administration. They will know the major principles underlying the constitutional apparatus. They will be able to converse with other administrators of all parts of the country about these common features of governmental organization.

In respect to the second type of knowledge -- the knowledge of the laws governing the agency in which they may find themselves -- there will remain always a collection of "things to do" and "things not to do" that is the property of a particular agency. These are the laws, rules, and regulations that are relatively immune from the influence of political theory, administrative theory, and research as we shall discuss it here today. An administrator must know what is the legally correct way to hire or fire a man, whatever the general body of theory and facts about hiring and firing.

But in this second respect, the expansion of government has made the universities' task impossible. When few agencies existed and administrative law was relatively simple, students in courses in administration could almost be prepared for any agency with one or two courses at a university. This is no longer true and the universities must abandon hope of preparing men vocationally for any precise agency of the government.

So, on the whole, the field of administration remains fixed with reference to requiring a general knowledge of American government, and remains fixed in that a person must somehow acquire a knowledge of the laws of his agency, but this knowledge is no longer feasible within a university's curriculum.

But the chief problems of research in government do not lie within the areas I have just mentioned, that is, the areas of constitutional structure and special administrative law. Within those features of the administrative situation ^{which} ~~that~~ are flexible, that is, those features which are within the scope and powers of the administrator himself, there has come about great change, so that administration today in the more advanced institutions of the country is scarcely recognizable in terms of the past. This great change in the character of the field of administration itself is paralleled in the area of research in government. Consequently, what I say about research in government becomes almost a mirror of what I would say if I were describing recent trends in the field of public administration.

The major transformation that tells us what to expect in research is common to society as a whole, to the government as a whole, to governmental administration, to education in public administration, to publications in the field of administration, and to research in government. The transformation has taken the following character: government has become highly complex, it

has become a kind of replica of all the skills, all the operations, all the energies of a society. In consequence more and more different sciences have become involved in government, taking their own special place within the complex of activities called government. All of their special vocabularies, techniques, and propositions have become part of governmental science. Governmental science has become another word for all the science there is. And the field of public administration has been expanding and shattering into fragments at the same time. We have been put in a position of being able to make two extraordinary statements at the same moment. First, administration has become almost the queen of sciences, and second, administration as a field of science doesn't exist.

I do not think I have to explain in what sense public administration is the queen of science. I probably have an audience agreeable to that notion. However, I shall have to explain what I mean when I say that the field of public administration shows evidences of disappearing. I again remind you that the constitutional structure is not disappearing, nor is the body of law that a man must know in an agency disappearing. What is disappearing is the field of administration as distinguished from law. This was the field discovered by Europeans first, and then by Americans like Wilson, Goodnow, Merriam, Pfiffner, and White. Almost as soon as it was discovered, it began to disintegrate. The process resembled the Florida real estate speculation period. Land previously ignored was rediscovered and widely publicized by real estate operators who sold it to people as pieces of paradise. But when the people came to occupy it, the land was slipping beneath the sea.

Now this process in administration, as in real estate, has had some dismaying effects. Men who have been trained to practice so-called administration, men who had chairs in universities that required that they teach

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administration, and journal editors who were supposed to publish articles on administration, have been much embarrassed by the transformation. Unlike the Florida real estate men they could not make their way to California where the land was more durable. They are compelled to stand and be amazed and to recover and to learn. What they are learning is this: that there is no social science and no part of any social science that is not of concern to public administration. There is no technique or method practiced in any social science that is not transferrable to the field of administration. Any proposition about human behavior is relevant to public administration, and any person trained to study human relations, whether he be an anthropologist, a geographer, an economist, a sociologist, or a political scientist, has a contribution to make to public administration. I could cite hundreds of examples of this point and they are all annoying to one who would like to feel that he once mastered a professional skill, but who now learns that he didn't master anything and that all kinds of odd people are boldly announcing the fact that he was not a master of anything. It must grieve us to discover that a psychiatrist and anthropologist such as Alexander Leighton could be established on an administrative staff in a project governing large numbers of Japanese-Americans, and emerge from his work with principles of administration as good as any that our own political scientists have developed. It is sometimes embarrassing when psychologists like Guetzkow tell principles underlying the committees and conferences that many of us have experienced by the hundreds, or when Rensis Likert, Angus Campbell, Dorwin Cartwright, and their Michigan colleagues produce public opinion studies, morale studies, technological change studies, and a host of others, that are perfectly acceptable parts of the doctrine of public administration as well as of the fields of psychology and sociology. Nor need I more than mention the effects of the works of men such as Elton Mayo, Fritz Roethlisberger, Whitehead, Homans, and the Harvard

business school generally. Beyond some structural principles, beyond some law, I fear we must conclude that the field is thrown open to every working social scientists. The only way to avoid the new work would be to artificially expand the structural and legal knowledge required of administrators. They would then become like the ancient Chinese literati, entrenched bureaucrats filled with useless knowledge and skills that are used to screen candidates. Our society, unlike the Chinese, would not tolerate such a condition. If we are not to make the field of administration appear absurd we must endorse an FEPC policy to fairly employ the practices and contributions afforded us by all the social sciences. Lest we feel put upon by such a policy I should like to point out that the fields of educational administration, and this is a big field indeed, business administration, and military administration are undergoing similar pressures and will undergo a similar fate. The curriculum of the Graduate School of Business at Harvard is becoming a general course of study in applied social science. The same is true of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and elsewhere. The Army Ground Forces, the Air Force, and the Navy have subscribed millions of dollars over the past several years to projects in personnel, leadership, in recruitment, in effective organization that are as far removed from the military concerns in those fields of twenty years ago as night from day. Not only are the scientists, the skills, the techniques, the theories much different, but the very fact that these institutions even engage in research is itself a remarkable development.

~~As I see what is occurring,~~ the more complicated the operations of government ~~that must be scrutinized,~~ and the broader the sciences and concepts ~~that must be~~ used to investigate problems of government, the more common research in government becomes. When the complexities of a problem of analysis expand, the need for a staff develops and a staff is one easy step from research. To say staff

is almost to say research. And depending upon the permanent or transitory nature of the problems, one will have a staff or not a staff, and if a staff, one sufficient to conduct its own research or one that will call in consultants or contract outside research. And if not a staff, then there can be no doubt that if the job is to be done properly, consultants must be hired, or research by outside groups contracted for, or an adequate general auxiliary agency for research established within the governments or by cooperation of several governments.

It has been already true for some years and will be increasingly true in the future that the administrator who knows how to perform staff services himself or can maximize the use of staff will be in greater demand as a valuable team member. Furthermore, a staff man who knows how to draw from the exceedingly divergent streams that contribute principles to administrative behavior will be an equally valuable person. In his mind and in his operations, the administrator of the future will use an intricate and ramifying intelligence network that will pick up and transmit to him with maximum dispatch and reliability all factors discovered by the several social sciences that may play on a problem he is interested in resolving quickly. An ancient Greek philosopher, Diogenes, was famous for his ability to speak extemporaneously on any scientific, moral, or literary topic and prided himself on the impeccability of his presentation according to the knowledge of the time. The administrator of recent times has often been compelled to act as if he were Diogenes but in his heart has known how foolish these pretensions were. Today and in the future he may approach the ideal of Diogenes by tapping the innumerable channels of communication that carry the knowledge of a society.

Knowing that such a communication or circulatory system exists is not enough. The administrator must understand its nature as exactly as a student of physiology must learn his anatomy. What channel carries what information?

Whose scientific opinion is most necessary in a given instance? Who performs this desired kind of research? What consultant is most qualified? The man with a glib answer to an administrative problem (and I should add the recruit with the glib answer) is ordinarily to be distrusted. By contrast, the man whose mind initially begins to swing like a giant telescope across the horizons of knowledge is to be sought for, provided (I need hardly say) that he can, as soon as is necessary, take his eyes from the telescope and provide a concrete solution or finding.

These broad shifts in the intellectual and operational orientations of the field of public administration are reflected in some rather specific changes in the organizations that teach, publish, do research in, and apply the principles of administration. Several of these developments have been implied in what I have already said, but they may be pulled out and clarified and joined with others that I can call to mind.

The more advanced schools of administration today de-emphasize the teaching of facts about specific and real agencies. Instead, they emphasize training in techniques of finding facts, making surveys, conducting interviews, and analyzing problems. The intensive case study, for example, is replacing the bird's eye view. Or, to take another illustration, field work is taking more of the student's time from library work. Or, yet another example, courses in personnel and administrative organization are being subverted into courses in psychology and psychological methods and courses in the sociology of organization. In respect to this last development, which has often been the despair of traditional teachers of administration and the administrators themselves, one can discern a tendency of the most influential courses in public administration in America to be taught by men who are considerably more interested in finding realistic principles of administrative behavior than they are in supplying

a market for administrators. The reaction to this trend need not be simple resentment but may well be an increase in inservice training or specific preservice training by the agencies themselves. It is a mistake to prefer a third-rate recruit, versed in the commonplace facts of administration, to a man of superior intellect and background, who within a few months would achieve the same crammed condition. If many progressive private corporations in the country can accept and adjust to this trend I see no excuse for administrators' ignoring and opposing it.

Related to these changes in the educational process is a second trend. To the annoyance of many practitioners, the universities are showing less interest in run-of-the-mill operational research services to governments, and greater interest in doing what their staffs consider to be basic research in administration the applications of which are left to operating administrators and this important new group I have spoken about -- the interpreters of research, the consultants, the journals of administration. The pecuniary largesse of a legislature, school district, or city may shower effulgently upon a university that seems to provide the kind of service the legislature is too innocent to provide for itself, but as soon as such a university operation grows fat it will begin to disport itself in the fields of basic research. If a faculty person is any good he will learn to distinguish between dollars for research; He will prefer the dollar that brings him professional prestige to the dollar that answers a quiz show question.

A third trend in the field of administrative publishing may be foreseen. A journal of administration like that of any other science has inherent schismatic tendencies. A science develops by proliferating special parts. The special parts are interested in their own development, but the more profuse the spawning of parts the greater the need for constant attention to integrating

theory. The journal of a developing science consequently goes licketysplit in two opposed directions, towards satisfying the quite separate parts and towards integrating the parts. No one is happy, least of all the editor. What is ultimately needed is not one but several journals. The first would treat of the basic science of human behavior and this would best be known not as a journal of administration, or at least public administration at all, but by the name of human relations or human management or some such title. Then the highest level of a journal in public administration proper would be one that develops theories and propositions from general social science into usable propositions in the field of administration, adding to the basic discoveries of social science those elements which must be watched for more frequently in public administration than in other fields. Then would come a journal devoted to case studies, another journal devoted to law, and finally a number of journals corresponding to the fragmentalized parts of the science of public administration. These last journals would satisfy the urgent needs of a few people for contributions to their every-day problems. Probably, there should be added a journal devoted to reporting research in progress from the many fields that contribute to public administration, as well as from public administration itself, and this same journal might handle the problem of annotated and systematic bibliography.

Finally, I would repeat, for emphasis, that governmental officials are "on their own." They must take the initiative, they must acquire the knowledge necessary to bring the right kind of research to bear upon their practical problems. To do this, they need more than good will and appropriations even though these two requirements alone may often seem to be exorbitant. They need to know what good governmental research is. I believe that many millions of dollars are wasted annually on useless research projects. The personnel employed

may be poor, the design of the project may be deficient, or the project may be visualized in impractical terms that can never be realized in terms of the real political and administrative situation. A mayor or governor, a city council or legislative committee, cannot implement research that presumes god-like rulers and voters. Putting the boss on the spot may be good fun, but is usually bad administration. This is only one of many principles regarding the use of research in government that the administrator ought to know thoroughly. I know of no unit of a level of government in America today that possesses many administrators familiar with the hiring, conduct, and disposal of research. The first government that gathers together its administrators for a systematic consideration and self-education in these problems will be justly famous as the inventor of a valuable practice in American administration.