

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction and Orientation to Organization Theory

This book explores the complex topic of public organizations. Organizations are made up of a group or groups of people who are brought together to accomplish ends beyond that which a single individual can achieve alone. **Public organizations** are distinct in that they must respond to citizens, law, politics, and change in ways different than most private organizations. We build organizations because of what they can do for us. We are born and raised in and then spend most of our lives directly or indirectly affiliated with them. Understanding the way organizations work in an increasingly complex, global, diverse, technological, and changing world is critical to our ability to thrive in the world both personally and professionally. This book explores how we have come to know and understand public organizations over time and will help readers to explore their own thinking and experiences in and around them.

**Organization theory (OT)** is a multidisciplinary set of ideas and concepts that seek to explain or predict relationships among things in and around organizations. OT carefully focuses on topics that concern the organization as a whole, such as environment, culture, goals, effectiveness, strategy, decision making, change, innovation, structure, and life cycle. OT is not to be confused with organizational behavior, a subset of OT that focuses on understanding the actual behavior of individuals and groups in organizations and is a framework for understanding how such things make an organization tick.

To study organizations is to study the social world, which in many ways can be a more challenging subject matter than studying natural entities, be it microbes or galaxies. In our explorations throughout this book, we observe social and organizational life in order to discern and understand patterns. Such patterns are often fluid and difficult to measure, and we believe that identifying—let alone making sense of them—is made easier through the use a variety of theoretical lenses. Before introducing the lenses we'll be using, we need to first say a bit more about the institutional context of the organizations we're interested in.

## The Complex World of Public Organizations: A Primer

Public organizations reflect the society they serve. We must appreciate the contextual factors that influence the practice in order to better understand it. In an age of intense public scrutiny, rapid technological advancements, and changing organizational demographics, administrators face many complex challenges, requiring them to wear many hats. The changing nature of work and the workforce, in addition to the expectations of the public, requires that public administrators think about many things beyond the walls of the organization. Before exploring the current political and administrative climate, we want to briefly examine the conceptual background of public administration and public organizations.

Many of us who are interested in studying organizations do so because we are students and scholars of public administration. Exactly what *is* public administration? The root word of *public* is *populous*, which essentially means “the people.” The root word of *administration* is *minos*, which means “detail and service.” So, in essence, public administration means “the details or service of the people.” How is this different than private administration? Public administration, more so than private administration, is culturally bound, legally based, and institutionally founded. Public administration in the United States exists within a federal system, and governance is based on shared powers, separation of powers, and authority across many branches. Public administration is part of our governmental system, and public organizations, which carry out policies and implement programs, reflect the underlying values, laws, ideologies, structures, and technologies of the United States.

The creation of the United States was shaped, to a great extent, by values of classical liberalism. These values include individualism, freedom, equality, capitalism, democratic ideals, and limited representative government. Although we have a strong intuitive sense of what each of these values entails, they can be difficult to precisely define and they can often exist in tension with one another. For example, it’s often noted that efforts to ensure equality can have the effect of diminishing individual freedom. Resolution of these tensions is a political process, and politics, for our purposes, has to do with achieving the good life.

Despite the possibility of tension among our founding values, the United States has maintained a substantial level of ideological agreement over our history, and our disagreements occur largely at the margins.<sup>1</sup> It is important to remember that public organizations exist within this context and that the people in the organization are a product of this culture as well. Public organizations operate in fairly transparent goldfish bowls, unlike much of the rest of the world that can draw the curtains so that their activities are more difficult to observe. It is often public administrators, rather than politicians, judges, or the public, who are responsible for finding ways to balance these ideas and values.

Americans often talk about ideology and culture as something that other countries have and the United States does not. In a sense, the United States is nonideological—but only to the extent that the majority of us ascribe to similar ideologies. Public administrators reflect the culture in which they grow up, in which they live, in which they are educated, and in which our government structures were developed. Our political culture-ideology determines basic orientations toward ourselves and others, ideas about economics, the role of individuals and government, and what we value and what we see and fail to see.

We have a federal constitution that is now over 200 years old. Essentially a written framework for our government and outline of our political values, the Constitution established a

strong national government made up of legislative, executive, and judicial branches and provided for the control and operation of that government. It articulates many of our political norms and ideologies and institutionalizes the assumptions and values of our political and social culture. The Constitution provided fundamental law, was the legal basis for public administration (but it is not specified there), established supremacy of national government, set up a federal system of shared power (federalism), and separated government into three branches (bicameral legislative, executive, and judicial branches). Within this constitutional context and its inherent values, we find the development of the field of public administration.

Paul Appleby described the distinction between public and private organizations when he explained that public servants must possess a “governmental attitude” in which the public’s needs are put first, there is a sense of action, and there is a feeling of the need for decisions.<sup>2</sup> He also explained that the government function and attitude should have at least three complementary aspects that differentiate government from all other institutions and activities. They are breadth of scope, impact, and consideration; public accountability (meaning no action of government is immune to public debate, scrutiny, or investigation); and political character (government is politics). Appleby argued that government is different because government is politics. He insisted that to have governmental processes that were not political contradicts the experience of being American. He stated, “Governments exist so that there is someone in society charged with promoting and protecting the public interest.”<sup>3</sup> It is within this context that we find public organizations.

With this conceptual foundation in mind, we can highlight several sociopolitical and economic factors that also influence the actions of governance organizations in important ways. First, the roles and functions of public administrators are political in that they determine the allocation of government resources.<sup>4,5</sup> They must abide by rules and regulations set forth by the political system and policy process and, ultimately, influence policy. Public administrators are expected to uphold the democratic values upon which our political system is based, while simultaneously being held accountable to individual concerns within their organizations.

Second, the roles and functions of public administrators are constitutional, because they must recognize the rights and privileges espoused within the Constitution as they examine the way they deal with people both inside and outside of public organizations. Administrators must consider equity, justice, public interest, rights, and the underlying values of the American government system and also be accountable and responsive to the public and to employees within those boundaries.<sup>6,7</sup>

Third, the roles and responsibilities are legal, in that their actions are limited by precedents and court decisions.<sup>8,9</sup> Organizations may depend upon decisions made at other levels of government, and often rely upon those other levels for a variety of resources.<sup>10,11</sup> Their roles are also legal in that public organizations may be granted quasi-legislative or quasi-judicial authority to make rules and adjudicate violations of those rules.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, their roles and functions are social because their decisions and actions often result from the demands of citizens and the characteristics of their communities. Public interest frequently initiates reform efforts, and public administrators must pay attention to these forces within their organizations and communities.

Finally, they are organizational in that public administrators need to work within political, constitutional, legal, and social constraints in the name of effective and efficient organizations. They must allocate resources in such a way as to maximize effectiveness and productivity and

not tip the scales of balance away from adherence to public expectations. And here we find ourselves back at the organizational. This book will look closely at the theories in and around public organizations. In the public sector, administrators have to think about many things beyond the walls of the organization.

The environment that lies beyond the boundaries of the organization has become more complex in recent times. The simple distinction between public and private, while useful, is insufficient for capturing the variety of organizations, which have a role in what we might more broadly consider public affairs. The breadth of organizations given consideration in this text includes not only traditional public organizations but also nonprofit organizations, quasi-public organizations, and some private organizations because these nonpublic organizations have a direct role in carrying out public policy.

The attention to what might loosely be termed *traditional public agencies* is reasonably straightforward. This group includes those organizations, whether at the federal, state, or local level, that are funded directly through public revenues of some form. Personnel who staff these organizations may take oaths of office in which they commit to upholding the Constitution and are typically provided with some level of legal protection in the exercise of their duties.

Increasingly, the distinction between public organizations and other sorts of organizations has become blurred. For example, nonprofit organizations have long had a role in public affairs. Churches and charity organizations have carried out activities that parallel or sometimes even replace those of public social service agencies. Over time, the relationship between public and nonprofit organizations has in some cases become more formalized through the creation of contracts for products or services. As politics and policy have prompted public organizations to reduce staff size and move some activities into the private sector, the range of specific programs executed by nonpublic organizations has grown and the relationships between public and private organizations has become more formal and extensive.

It is worth noting that the nonprofit designation is a legal one that is established under the federal tax code and is overseen by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). While service organizations of all sorts, including schools, health care providers, social service organizations, and others are granted nonprofit status—often under 501(c)(3) designation—tax-exempt status also includes a wide range of separate designations for other organizations and activities including labor or agricultural organizations under the 501(c)(5) designation, business leagues under 501(c)(6), child care organizations under 501(k), the now-notorious 501(c)(4) political organizations, and many others. Tax-exempt, nonprofit, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally defined as private institutions, independent of the government, that provide services to populations for whom public programs are unavailable or insufficient. We argue that in the current climate, which includes political and social trends such as devolution and globalization, NGOs must be included in any study of public organizations because they are a major part of the answer to questions of who provides services as well as where and how those services are provided to the public.

To complicate the picture even further, political authorities, from city councils to the US Congress have created other nonpublic organizations as mechanisms for carrying out public policy. At the local level, city councils may create nonprofit development authorities to facilitate the process of economic development. At the federal level, Congress has created a number of different organizations, such as Fannie Mae and Sallie Mae. Some of these organizations are both shareholder owned, like many for-profit corporations, and backed by the full faith and credit

of the US Treasury, like traditional federal agencies. Such organizations advance ends that are clearly to the benefit of the public, like expanding home ownership and higher education, but their operations simultaneously raise important questions about oversight and accountability that are critical features of how public organizations function.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there are those organizations that fall squarely on the private side of the old public-private dichotomy. Private contractors, such as those providing construction services, and others, like defense contractors, fit into this category. The range of products and services provided by these organizations is ever growing and expanding, from high-profile logistical and security services provided to the military for overseas operations by organizations like Halliburton and Academi (formerly known as Blackwater) to the civil government and training contracts provided by organizations such as Lockheed Martin.

Although it is implied in the elements described in the preceding paragraphs, organizational diversity also includes the myriad objectives and activities of organizations. While the work of public organizations includes obvious and traditional activities such as the promotion and protection of health, education, safety, and defense, they also include a much wider range of less traditional work. A brief selection includes discovery (National Science Foundation [NSF], National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]), socialization (community centers), preservation (museums and monuments), recreation (parks), and transportation (state and federal departments of transportation, Federal Aviation Administration [FAA]).

One purpose of this book is to introduce students to the complexity and variety of organizations as a way of pointing out that there are commonalities among organizations of any size, shape, or purpose. The following section presents a preliminary set of characteristics of organizations and ways of knowing about organizations.

## **Size and Structure**

Public organizations have dramatically changed in size and shape over the past several centuries, and many started quite humbly. When the US Department of State was created following the ratification of the Constitution in 1789, the department was composed of seven employees including the secretary. More than 100 years later, when the Division of Grazing, a predecessor to the current Bureau of Land Management, was created, the first agency head had to borrow all of its seventeen staff members from the US Forest Service to manage the 142 million acres of public lands it was to administer.<sup>14</sup>

These early public organizations stand in stark contrast to the size and complexity of contemporary agencies. For example, the Department of State, with its modest beginnings, had grown to more than 39,000 employees by 2010 and more than fifty separate offices and bureaus across the globe.<sup>15, 16</sup> In 2004 there were some 1.43 million active duty uniformed military personnel. Local governments reflect these trends as well. Fairfax County, Virginia, an urban-suburban county in the greater Washington, DC, area employs some 10,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees across more than forty major departments and agencies.<sup>17</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum, myriad small public organizations provide the entire range of public services, especially in tiny, rural communities. Small, incorporated cities may have populations as small as 1,000 residents and often have payrolls of just a dozen or fewer employees. While the organizations that comprise the governments of these small public entities

represent only a fraction of the public workforce, there are thousands of these units across the nation providing services to millions of people. The impact and breadth of activities undertaken by these organizations merit consideration and study and also reveal the need for considerable conceptual flexibility among scholars and practitioners who are interested in working across the diversity of contemporary organizations.

## ***A Brief History of Organizational Studies***

Formal study of organizations began around the turn of the last century, though obviously the history and existence of formal organizations dates back much further. While all organizations have in common the fact that they exist to accomplish goals, the complexity and variety of such goals has clearly expanded dramatically in the past century. Growth in industry, technology, population, and services to the public have dramatically impacted organizations structurally, functionally, socially, demographically, and even politically. According to Mary Jo Hatch, there are four historic perspectives on OT.<sup>18</sup> These are classical, modern, symbolic interpretive, and postmodern. We examine these ideas in more depth later in the text, but the following outline provides some historical context and content useful in framing our study of organizations.

Classical OT focuses on both sociological and classical management theories. Early on, organizational thinkers sought to discover universal principles that could be applied to organizations scientifically in the name of efficiency and productivity. In the early 1900s, engineer Frederick Taylor developed **scientific management theory**, which espoused that there was “one best way” to accomplish a task that could be scientifically studied, understood, taught, and applied.<sup>19</sup> Taylor viewed organizations as machines of which people were the moving parts, and he was preoccupied with the question of how to get more work out of those machines. He lived at a time of corruption, inefficiency, political immorality, and growing industrialization, which gave way to a gospel of efficiency—for efficiency was synonymous with good. He was one of the leading spokesmen who preached to businesspeople, workers, doctors, housewives, teachers, and clergy about efficiently running their organizations. Taylor’s underlying values were efficiency, rationality, productivity, and profit. While the impact of Taylor’s classical thinking has clearly left a lasting impression on modern-day organizations, his thinking is often criticized for being rigid, rationally focused, and impersonal.

Best known for his work on bureaucracy, a German lawyer, historian, sociologist, and economist named Max Weber defined bureaucratic organizations as hierarchical, legally based, controlled, neutral, rule bound, based on career service, and impersonal.<sup>20</sup> Weber’s bureaucracy was characterized by careful division of labor, specialization by function, chain of command, formal framework of rules and procedures, maintenance of records, and professionalization. The central purposes of these characteristics, as Weber described, were control, uniformity, discipline, and efficiency. His explanation was consistent with developments in government in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The field of public administration grew with these principles clearly in sight, and his influence can still be seen in today’s organizations. Other classical theorists, including Henri Fayol, Chester Barnard, Elton Mayo, and others extended and further developed classical concepts of authority, control, and communications first articulated by Taylor and Weber.

This early approach to the study of organizations largely ignored the human dimension, focusing instead on efficiency, rationality, money, and authority. In 1927, a Harvard psychologist in

the School of Business, Elton Mayo, and his student assistant, Fritz Roethlisberger, started a five-year study of factors effecting productivity in Western Electric's Hawthorne Works plant near Chicago.<sup>21,22</sup> For example, they sought to determine if better working conditions, brighter lighting, formal or informal structural changes, more breaks, or different work spaces increased employee output. As they studied the different conditions, they found that productivity did go up. At this point, their results became confusing. After increasing illumination, the researchers began to turn the lighting down further and further until employees were almost in the dark, and productivity still went up. They isolated workers and productivity improved. They then put workers into work groups and worker output increased.

The phenomenon they ultimately recognized has been come to be known as the **Hawthorne effect**, which means that people change their behavior when they know they are being observed or paid attention to. They also found that informal social groups had a strong effect on productivity and that cohesive work groups can effect productivity. They started off looking at the situation from one perspective and ended up refining that to include an understanding of the human dimension in organizations. The Hawthorne studies opened the way to investigate factors beyond the formal organization and established the importance of social structure, organizational culture, and worker interaction as vital elements of productive organizations.

According to Hatch's model, from the classical school of thinking came the modern perspective, whose foundations could be traced back to systems theory.<sup>23,24,25</sup> Systems theory looks at factors both internal and external to the organization to see how and why people perform their jobs the way they do. Daniel Katz and Kahn argued that social organizations were living systems that continually interacted with their environment and, thus, were highly dependent on their external environment to maintain their internal one.<sup>26</sup> As a result, organizations constantly adjust and adapt in response to their environment in order to avoid entropy. This reasoning led them to accurately predict that organizations would attempt to enhance their capacities for assessing environmental factors.

Systems are sets of variable, dynamic, complicated, and interrelated components that interact with the world. A system takes energy and resources from the environment in the form of inputs and transforms it into outputs (services, information, etc.). Systems theory recognizes the dependence of organizations on their environments, recognizes that a number of approaches may be successful, and emphasizes the importance of information. Systems theory looks at differentiation rather than specialization and values the synergy that comes from dealing with thousands of interdependent relationships—linkages to people, groups, or organizations with diverse goals, opinions, and beliefs.

The third perspective in Hatch's model is the symbolic interpretive perspective, in which it is espoused that reality is socially constructed. Additionally, this approach recognizes that actions are often a result of the meanings that individuals attach to a particular social construct.

The final perspective presented by Hatch is postmodernism. Postmodern organizational theories tend to value multiple ways of knowing and resist the belief that there is one best way or one universal truth to be found in an organization. Additionally, postmodernism typically implies a deep skepticism of hierarchy and focuses, instead, on complexity, varying forms of diversity and difference, and the growing experience of ambiguity in organizations.

What Hatch's framework reveals beyond the loose historical eras that characterize organization studies is that we have multiple perspectives from which to view them. It is important to understand that there are different forms of organizations that perform more or less effectively

in different environments and under different conditions. Organizations cannot ignore formality or context. They must have specialized employees but must be flexible enough to deal with adversity, change, and competition. They must be closed in the sense that boundaries are identifiable and activities predictable yet be open to change within the organization and the environment. With that, let's explore the uniqueness of public organizations, to further establish the context for this text.

## ***A Brief Political History***

If, as we are arguing, the study of public organizations stands apart from the study of other sorts of organization in critical ways, then it is important to identify some source of the difference. Obviously, organizations are not insulated from the social conditions and trends of the societies in which they operate. And while political and social dynamics are likely to be related, the political environment shapes the behaviors and structures of public organizations in ways that deserve separate focus.

According to Frederick Mosher in *Democracy and the Public Service*, the governance of our country has undergone significant shifts over time.<sup>27</sup> These shifts are helpful in understanding the context of our government, public administration, and modern public organizations. These are fundamental shifts in “the purposes, phases, and methods of federal operations.”<sup>28</sup> Mosher identifies the following shifts in experiences in and around governance and organizations in the United States.

### ***1789–1829: Government by the Gentlemen***

It was during this time that the Constitution was ratified. Only those of the highest socioeconomic status took part in governance. This stratification based on socioeconomic status is consistent with James Madison's description of a “natural aristocracy” that he believed would emerge in American society, based on merit. Rather than the hereditary aristocracy, or ruling class, that existed in England, those who would rise to prominence in American government would do so because of their economic and intellectual prowess. It was, however, white, wealthy, male property owners who became largely responsible for defining governance during this era.

### ***1829–1883: Government by Common Man***

During this period in our history, President Jackson was elected on a platform of reform. Jackson was in favor of replacing the caucus system in elections and encouraging the common man to be involved in government. Unions were expanding, and the frontier spirit was consistent with increased democratization. States were removing property requirements from voting, and Wyoming, in 1869, even let women vote. A lot of these changes were accomplished through political parties.

As a result, one did not necessarily have to be a man or a wealthy property owner in order to participate in governance. One only had to be a loyal party member. While this made the face of government and workforces more representative, it also brought about spoils and patronage systems in which family, friends, and loyal party members used their connections to find work in governance. This, of course, led to corruption and, subsequently, to loss of respect



for government and public servants. Allegations were that increasing numbers of unqualified people were appointed to government positions.

As a result of the corruption associated with the spoils system, the country underwent the civil service reform movement—the Progressive reform movement—which was antiparty, spoils, and patronage and attempted to deal with these problems. The “good guys” during this reform movement were those who were antipolitical party, while the “bad guys” were in favor of political parties. This movement culminated with passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883, which was designed to take power away from the parties by saying that it was illegal to hire-fire on the basis of party affiliation and created a new criterion for government service, nonpartisanship. So the good guys won. Mosher called this shift “government by the good.”

### *1883–1906: Government by the Good*

The notion of the “good” during this period can be understood and seen in two different ways. First, this was an era of the morally upright in government. This is in part a response to the corruption that was seen as an outcome of the spoils system. The second form of good comes to be defined as competent and nonpartisan. Public administration was defined as neutral and independent from politics and nonpartisan.

The question that emerged about this definition was the following: How do administrators stay neutral yet responsive to elected officials and democratic controls? Woodrow Wilson offered a solution in 1887. Wilson described a separation of political decision making from administrative implementation, what we now call the **politics-administration dichotomy**. He explained that the core elements and objectives of policy were to be determined by elected representatives and that administration would be neutrally or scientifically carried out by administrators. There would, according to Wilson, be little threat of abuse from administrative discretion. Wilson argued that politics may set tasks and goals for administration but should not manipulate the process. He had modest aims for his work, which is now considered to be the beginning of public administration as a field of study and practice.

Wilson’s dichotomy was a conceptual separation—the administrative function was separate and distinct. This brought back some prestige and respect to public service. It suggested that we should look at the two separately and consider carefully the expertise needed to truly manage government and the protection of administration from politics—putting democratic principles and policymaking on top and subordinated public administration to public opinion.

Goodnow, founder and first president of the American Political Science Association, extended and articulated the notion of bureaucratic neutrality.<sup>29</sup> He is known for saying that “there is no ‘republican’ way to build a road.” Goodnow believed that executing authority was subordinate to creating authority and was an advocate of Wilson’s politics-administration dichotomy. He believed that politics and administration could be distinguished as “expression of the will of the state and the execution of that will,” though did feel that politics should have some control over administration, however, which was a slight shift away from the dichotomy.

### *1906–1937: Government by the Efficient*

Civil service reform and neutral competence (expertise independent from politics) fit nicely with what was happening in the private sector. By early 1906, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing and resulted in the emergence of a new type of organization, one that separated ownership

and management. The search for more scientific management procedures, as discussed in Chapter 2, created a new focus on efficiency and production. Much of the moral tone from the previously discussed era stayed intact—but it went from morality as nonpartisanship to morality as efficiency. Government tried to become more businesslike and rational through the use of planning, specialization of workers, and standardization. This still has a profound effect on current ideas about how government should be fixed, which are based on the assumption that management is separate from politics, so there *must* be some set of management truths that work equally well in government as they do in private businesses.

Based on Mosher's model our country had gone from an aristocracy, to one in which the common man was included in governance, to morally upright and nonpartisan, to efficient.<sup>30</sup> One era did not really replace the other; they simply built upon each other. As the century progressed, the government was growing and changing. Not only was it providing required public services, but after World War I and the Great Depression, the government became involved in managing social and economic change. The focus on efficiency, therefore, gave way to the next era.

### *1937–1955: Government by the Administrators*

During this period, public administrators were not mere technicians but rather they were generalist managers in charge of large, complex, social programs, which had grown during the New Deal period. Schools of public administration were well established, and managers were more sensitive to politics. There existed a growing acceptance of the fact that politics and administration were not entirely separate and an increasing concern about presidential control of bureaucracy. Two presidents, Roosevelt and Eisenhower, commissioned committees to look at the organization of government to help the president get control of and manage the bureaucracy.

World War II ended during this time frame. After the war, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as world superpowers. Competition around knowledge building, space travel, defense systems, and technology was high between the countries. Modern organizations were impacted heavily by this because they were now exposed to different ideas, cultures, trade arrangements, and technologies that broadened our views of who we were and what we could be. Again, Mosher's model did not replace one era with another—it layered them. Public servants were to be statesmen, common men, and morally upright, efficient administrators.

### *1955–1968: Government by the Professionals*

During this period of time, schools of public administration were well established. Public administration and public organizations grew and expanded optimistically. This was the era of the educated. Sputnik was launched by the USSR in 1957, and the United States believed that they were technologically and educationally behind. There was a revolution in the utilization of the professionals, the experts, and the white-collar worker with specialized knowledge with training in medicine, engineering, law, and psychology that generated some tension between public values and administrative values.

### *1968–Present: Government by the?*

In part as a result of the turbulence of the 1960s, new answers to dealing with the tension between public and administrative values began to emerge. One movement was New Public Administration (NPA) and was the first of several calls to make public administration more

public oriented and more political. During this time, agencies were reviewed, in an attempt to reverse some of the growth of previous decades. This was a more conservative agenda than had existed in the past. Advocates argued that public administration was not value free and that it ought to openly advance values such as social equity, democracy, and environmental quality. To this day, there is still not a lot of agreement about what sort of values or models are dominant or should be held as the responsibilities of public agencies. During this era, there was a blurring distinction between public and private, reform, and technology. This is a lengthy era, in which the country experienced post–Cold War shifts, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, various pursuits of free markets, serious political changes, and war, each serving to redefine and reform our thinking and practice in various ways (see Figure 1.1).

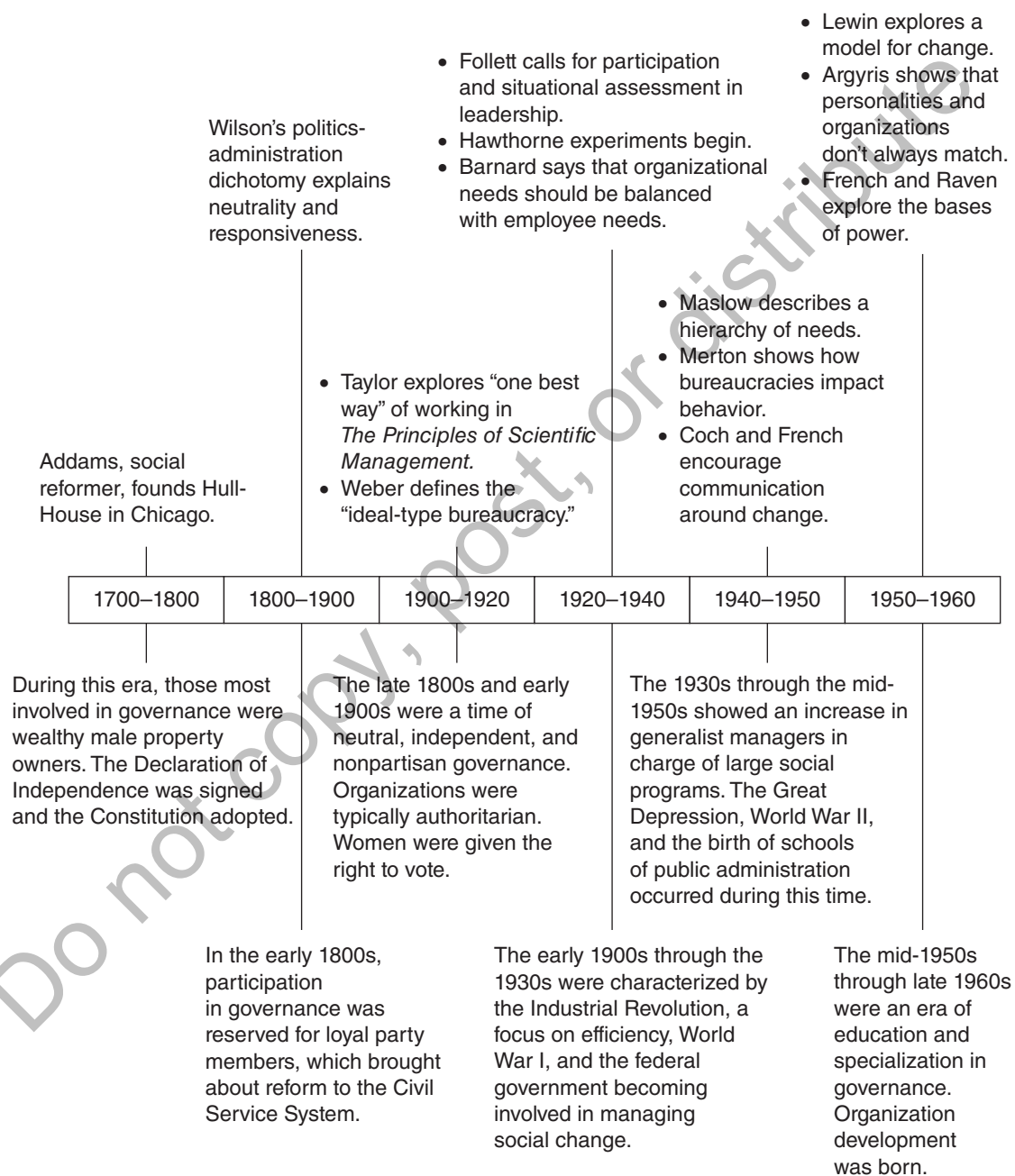
While these eras are loose conceptualizations of the major administrative trends at any period of time, and there is necessarily some overlap between them, they are useful in identifying both significant and changing currents in the field.

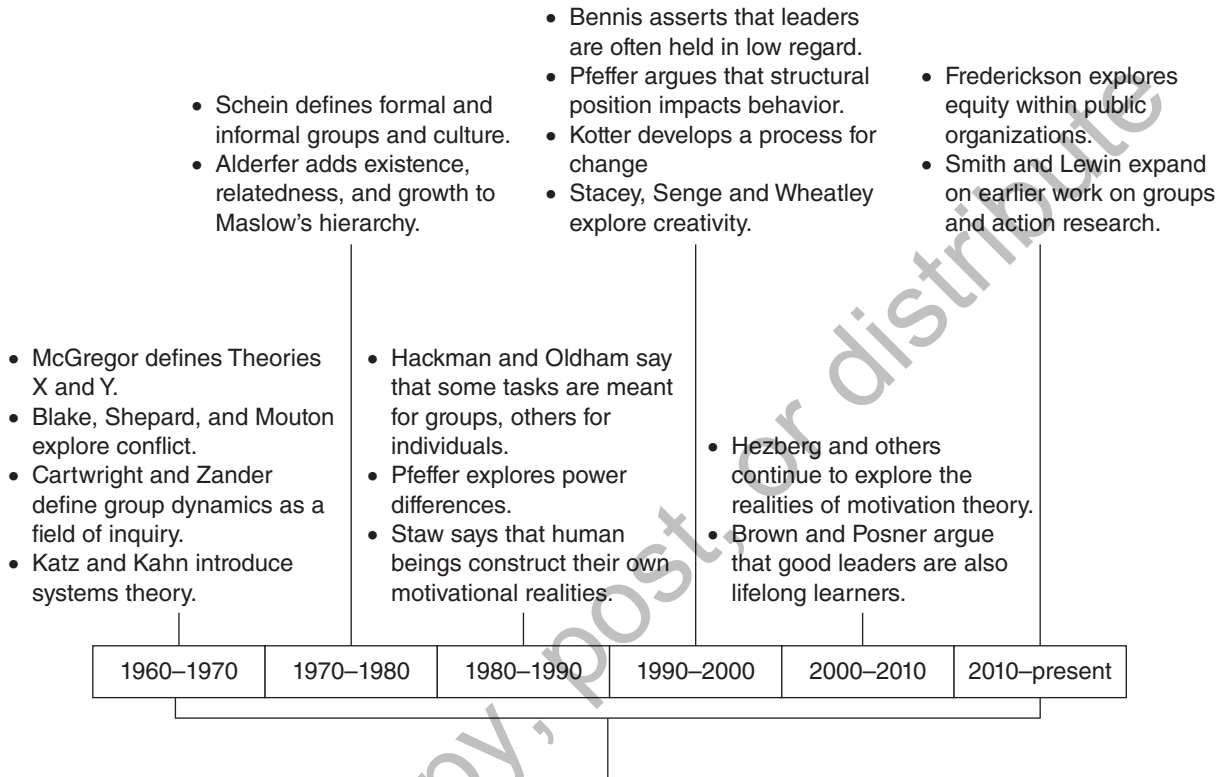
## Sociology of Knowledge: Ways of Knowing about Organizations

As we noted earlier, organizations reflect the societal context in which they operate. Knowledge—what we know and what we don’t—as well as how we acquire that knowledge shape how organizations respond to the world they are in. Gareth Morgan makes the case that it is possible to use several different metaphors to understand how organizations work.<sup>31</sup> Metaphors are the comparison of two dissimilar entities in order to highlight a particular and important attribute of the thing being studied. Among others, Morgan compares organizations with machines, natural organisms, brains, and political systems. Each metaphor highlights different attributes of how organizations behave and what shapes that behavior. While some metaphors are more widely used than others, no one metaphor is exhaustive in its ability to capture the rich and sophisticated activities of organizations. Just as no one metaphor is sufficient to capture all of the variations of organizational behavior, neither is there one theory or one body of knowledge that can do so either. Beyond metaphors, this section of the chapter identifies two other categories of knowledge—paradigms and disciplines; each has been used to frame our thinking about organizations.

Thomas Kuhn, in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, outlines the theory of paradigms as they relate to the nature and development of scientific knowledge.<sup>32</sup> According to Kuhn, paradigms are mutually exclusive and incommensurable; one cannot believe in two paradigms simultaneously. For example, a clear case of contending scientific paradigms and the shift from one to another is found in a move from a geocentric—earth-centered—view of the solar system to a heliocentric—sun-centered—view. There are a number of important aspects to this example. First, it shows how paradigms are mutually exclusive and incommensurable. The earth and sun cannot simultaneously be the center of the solar system. Moreover, one cannot simultaneously believe that both are true. Extending the example further, it reveals how paradigmatic commitments shape not only how one sees the world but what questions are asked in order to understand the world and what actions are possible to live within that world. Understanding how this is the case requires moving from this cele-

**Figure 1.1** A Brief Timeline of Organization Theory and Frederick Mosher's Eras of Governance





The late 1960s through the present represent a time of massive social and technological change. Public administration was encouraged to be more responsive and to openly advance the values of classic liberalism. Management trends such as total quality management came on the scene, while virtual and self-directed teams were also explored. Diversity of all types became much more broadly embraced throughout society and within organizations.

tial example to a more terrestrial case. Consider the behavior of light. Light has the unique ability to behave both like a wave and like a particle. Which light one chooses to work from (wave or particle) will determine what sorts of questions can be asked about the behavior of light and how the answers can be determined. Asking particle questions will not yield wave answers or vice versa. Similarly, in the social sciences, if one believes that human behavior can be understood as wholly rational, this choice implies different questions *and* yields different answers than does the understanding of human behavior as nonrational (emotional, intuitive, etc.).

At first glance, the inclusion of a philosopher of science in an OT text may seem a bit odd, but we believe that the notion of paradigms reveals important insights into the range of thinking about organizations and their functions. Burrell and Morgan suggest that there are several sociological paradigms that can be used to understand organizations.<sup>33</sup> According to Burrell and Morgan, theories of organization all fall into one of four distinct paradigms that are useful in not only understanding organization's behavior but also in understanding how people study and understand those organizations in the first place.<sup>34</sup>

There are difficulties associated with the conceptual use of paradigms in the social sciences. One difficulty is that unlike the physical sciences—wherein scientific revolutions or paradigm shifts occur when the empirical evidence of the new paradigm comes to outweigh, better describe, and predict the behavior of a physical system than does the old paradigm—in the social sciences the empirical evidence supporting one paradigm in relation to another continues to be contradictory and shows little likelihood of being resolved. A second problem is that the line between one paradigm and another in the social sciences—the extent to which paradigms are truly mutually exclusive and incommensurable—is less clear. The rational-nonrational example of human behavior is a case in point. It can be, and often is argued, that rational-nonrational is a false dichotomy and that human behavior is more complex. Perhaps it is the case that humans behave rationally in some cases and nonrationally in other instances or that rationality exists along a sort of continuum from wholly rational, to bounded-rationality, to nonrational, to irrational.

Given this fundamental and apparently insurmountable problem, why continue to use the concept of paradigms? The claim we make is that paradigms do something that other concepts, such as models and metaphors, don't do nearly as well. Paradigms clearly and intentionally reveal what philosophers call epistemology and ontology. In simple terms, epistemology is a theory of knowledge. It is a study of what can be known about the world and how we can know it. Ontology, sometimes used interchangeably (and somewhat imprecisely) with the term *metaphysics*, is a theory about the nature of the world and how it works. So the exploration of multiple paradigms reveals the fundamentally different understandings held by the range of social and organizational theorists about the nature of the world and what we can know about it.

More specifically, different paradigms have different, incommensurable, and mutually exclusive views about the nature of the world and what can be known about it. By extension then, paradigmatic commitments also imply something about what sorts of actions are possible and appropriate.

The conceptual use of paradigms does at least two things for students of organization. First, it helps reveal the ontological and epistemological commitments of adherents of any given paradigm. This is useful for analyzing and describing what organizations do and why.

The second benefit can be described more indirectly. A common, popular culture definition of *insanity* is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different outcomes. If paradigms presume or predetermine what questions we ask and what answers are possible, it seems likely that paradigms also prescribe and limit the range of actions and strategies that are conceivable. If our organizations do the same thing over and over again and continue to see suboptimal outcomes, perhaps shifting the paradigms we use to study and understand organizations can reveal new options for action.

### **A Note about Categories**

At least as early as the work of Aristotle, Western empiricism has been engaged in an evolving effort to develop an ever more sophisticated and accurate taxonomy or framework of categories into which the world around us can be divided. The general trend in this process has been to develop taxonomies in which categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Every entity, whether a bacterium or battleship, can fit into one specific category and no more than one category. For example, the system of classification for biological entities first developed by Linnaeus functions in this way.<sup>35</sup> Every living entity can fit into one and only one kingdom, phylum, order, family, genus, and species. This same tendency exists in the social sciences where we have worked to create exhaustive and mutually exclusive sets of disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, economics, political science) or organization types (e.g., public, private, nonprofit). Although such categories are useful as a sort of shorthand in our efforts to rapidly and systematically make sense of the world, and there are real differences between the things under consideration, the distinctions between categories frequently blur, blend, and even break.

However, if the study of organizations is to be something more than a big, jumbled mess, it is necessary to establish and use various taxonomies. Readers should be aware that we, as organization theorists and teachers attempting to help students learn about the messy and fascinating world of organizations, have chosen any number of categorization schemes and do our best to conform to the definitions associated with those schemes. However, we also recognize that many of the categories and definitions we use collapse under close examination. Our intent is to be as consistent as we can with the categories and definitions we use. At the same time, we believe that it is necessary, and we strive to help our students to practice the conceptual flexibility to become comfortable with the sorts of tensions and even paradoxes that emerge between and within the categorical schemes that we and others use.

## **Influential Theories and Paradigms in the Social Sciences**

The notion of paradigms is applicable as we begin to examine the intellectual disciplines that shape the thinking about organizations. While there are arguably other influential bodies of knowledge, three broad areas—the social sciences, the physical sciences, and the humanities—can be used to frame the primary influences on OT.

### ***Social Sciences: Sociology, Psychology, Economics, and Political Science***

Within the social sciences, this book will focus primarily on the contributions from four different disciplines—sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. Some of the earliest thinking about organizations is found in the work of Max Weber.<sup>36</sup> As noted earlier in the chapter, Weber was interested in the way groups of people come together and behave in groups. Weber's understandings of bureaucracy and authority (see Chapter 2) have been enormously influential and continue to have an impact on OT and practice. Many other sociologists have taken up where Weber left off, examining questions of power, culture, and socialization—all of which are connected to the behavior of people in groups.

If organizations are no more than collections of people, then another means of shedding light on their actions is through the examination of individual and collective psychology. Theorists from this discipline are interested in questions such as the following: What drives individuals' perceptions of the world around them? How do individuals and groups make sense of those situations? How do individuals and groups behave as they pursue particular goals and objectives?

The third scholarly discipline that has had a clear influence on organizational thinking is economics. A fundamental question for economists is the following: What motivates people to act? Based on the answers to this question, economists interested in organizations begin to explore topics that include the following: How can groups of people be motivated to accomplish organizational ends? What are the most efficient ways of structuring and operating organizations?

The final academic discipline considered in this collection of social sciences is included not for its contribution but instead for its notable lack of interest and input in the study of organizations. Given that political scientists are generally interested in questions of power and authority and associated structures and processes and also that public organizations are very much at the heart of efforts to accomplish political ends, the lack of original contributions to the field is indeed interesting. Although political scientists have had comparatively little to say about organizations specifically, they have a great deal they can add to the discussion of organizations and democracy. They have contributions to make in two related areas that are important to OT generally and to theories of public organizations specifically. Broadly, the two issues where political science has a clear contribution to make are in questions of how public organizations do or can contribute to a functional democracy and how, if at all, the ideals of democracy can be embodied in the internal processes of organizations.

### ***Physical-Natural Sciences: Chaos Theory, Ecological Sciences, and Cybernetics-Artificial Intelligence***

Interestingly, OT also has a robust history of drawing from the physical and natural sciences. There are a range of instances where parallels and perhaps even more direct connections can be drawn between social and natural phenomena. One of the most recent instances of this is the use of concepts developed in chaos and complexity theories (realizing that these are not synonymous areas of study). Ideas such as sensitivity to initial conditions and self-organizing systems seem to describe social systems nearly as well as metrological or fluid systems. Another example of OT use of the natural sciences includes concepts such as resource competition and



population dynamics from the biological and ecological sciences. Here, the general notion is that individual and groups of organizations can be understood based on our knowledge of how biological entities survive in natural environments. Finally, an example of applied sciences can be found in the application of cognitive sciences, cybernetics, and artificial intelligence to the way organizations manage information and make decisions. The extent to which the influence of the physical sciences has been conceptual and metaphorical rather than a direct application of mathematical or empirical modeling is an open, and sometimes contentious, question. Nevertheless, the influence of the physical sciences to date is undeniable and is likely to continue.

### ***The Humanities: Philosophy and Literature***

More recently, thinking emerging from the humanities, and especially literary theory and philosophy, has come to be influential on social and organization theory. For example, literary theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Jacques Derrida and philosophers such as Michel Foucault have introduced concepts generally associated with postmodernism into the social sciences and public administration specifically. Work in the humanities has been influential in prompting public administration scholars—and to a lesser extent, practitioners—to more intentionally examine their paradigmatic commitments and the consequences of those commitments. Recent work drawing on these influences strives to find new ways to operationalize the theories into administrative and organizational practices. Though many of the ideas remain controversial, recent thinking drawn from the humanities has certainly broadened the discourse within the field.

## **Levels of Analysis**

Looking across the fields of study that influence organizational thinking, one issue that should be apparent is that many of these approaches use different units of analysis, ranging from a single decision to entire populations of organizations. Within each of the disciplines that were previously described, researchers examine different aspects of the organization and select a unit of analysis that allows them to answer their questions of interests. Rather than identifying discrete units of analysis, we utilize a framework of five levels of analysis into which the theories we consider will loosely fall:

- *Individual and small group*: Questions at this level include developing an understanding of individual behavior, motivation, and responses to authority.
- *Structural*: At this level, the focus is on internal organizational structures, such as formal and informal authority, communications, and decision making.
- *Environmental*: Attention at this level centers on the relationship between the organization and its immediate environment including clients, constituents, suppliers, regulators, and oversight organizations.
- *Industrial*: Attention at the industrial level is given to how groups of similar organizations, such as school districts, operate and what influences that operation.
- *Societal*: At this level, questions center on how organizations influence entire societies and vice versa.<sup>37</sup>

Using these categories as a way of framing how we examine organizations is useful because it makes explicit an intuitive understanding of organizations that we already use. When we think about our experience in organizations, we often think about our interaction with particular employees (individual and small group), our encounters with formal procedures or authority, whether too much or too little (structural), or the ability or inability of entire agencies to meet community needs (environmental). Making these experiential and intuitive categories explicit gives us the ability to better organize and distinguish both theories and their resulting strategies.

## The Book's Approach

This book seeks to provide the reader with a sense of coherence and connectedness among various theories of organizations and will specifically place those theories into the context of public organizations. We explore the development of the field in terms of both theory and practice. Toward that end, the historical, institutional, and political context of the OT is examined throughout our treatment, as are current trends and issues in the field. We also emphasize both explicit and implicit values underlying the evolution of public administration and the implications of those values for the future of the field. This emphasis allows readers to familiarize themselves with the writings of prominent scholars and practitioners and the practical or operational implications of their ideas. The book intends to be practical and to suggest multiple ways to view organizations through different lenses such that students can craft strategies to take effective action in the organizations with which they find themselves working. Our attention to explicit and implicit values works at a more political level as well, and we want to push readers to consider the role and place of public administration in our social and political, or governance, system.

### *Voice of the Book*

There are several premises that should be articulated here at the beginning of the book and that will be important for interpreting what appears in the subsequent chapters. First, we point out that there are multiple paradigms present in the OT research and literature. These paradigms are actively held and utilized both for understanding and for managing public organizations. Kuhn, who developed the notion of scientific paradigms in seeking to understand and describe the development of empirical sciences, argued that paradigms are mutually exclusive and incommensurable; one could not adhere to two paradigms simultaneously. In an overly simple example from astronomy, one cannot simultaneously seek to understand the solar system as geocentric and heliocentric. More recently, social scientists like Burrell and Morgan have sought to demonstrate how social theory conforms with Kuhn's notion of paradigms. Our thinking on this point follows David Farmer's extensive exploration of epistemic pluralism.<sup>38</sup> We argue that while it may in fact be true that paradigms are logically incommensurable, as students and inhabitants of organizations, we make sense of and come to know about organizations in many different ways. We explicitly and implicitly use plural bodies of knowledge—epistemological paradigms—as a way of understanding and operating in organizations.

Second, we believe that these paradigms are best understood as being socially constructed. While there are clear and important real-world consequences of organizational actions, we understand the structures, processes, and interpretations of organizations to be built and maintained primarily in the minds and behaviors of those who are involved with organizations in some way. A metaphor from the game of chess may be of some use here in making this concept clear. While the eight-square-by-eight-square chessboard provides some real constraints on how the game of chess is played and there are a clear and formal set of rules governing play, the majority and most interesting structure (patterns of behavior) to the game is provided by the complex but widely known strategies that are held in the heads of the players. What makes chess fascinating is not simply the game as constrained by the board and formal rules but the stable patterns that have been developed and shared among players worldwide over the long history of the game. Similarly, while there are real constraints and influences on organizations, the interesting patterns, strategies, and informal rules that govern behavior in an organization exist primarily in the gray matter between people's ears, not the white matter between the covers of policy manuals or elsewhere in the real world. We believe that the best way to identify and examine these gray matter rules is by following an analytical theme that reveals paradigmatic commitments, consequences, contributions, and critiques of organization theories that will be treated throughout the book.

We are also committed to the retention of the possibility of human agency—intentional, directed human action. We hold to the belief that individuals and groups can choose to act together in such a way that organizations and the broader community can benefit. Besides, what fun would it be to live in a world where we can examine our situation but do nothing about it?

The following chapters focus primarily on the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of the theories under consideration. We have intentionally chosen to avoid attention to predictive theories—largely because we feel that as a practical matter prediction is largely too resource intense and imprecise to merit extensive attention. Given that even with the best science and computer modeling meteorologists have at their disposal, detailed weather forecasting is notoriously unreliable beyond just a few days. Throwing in the element of human behavior, and the prediction of organizational behavior seems a sketchy proposition.

More theoretically, a reluctance to engage in prediction is consistent with our paradigmatic commitments. Positioning ourselves as we have as constructivists, claims about the ability to make accurate predictions of individual or organizational behavior would push us toward a sort of positivist paradigm that we have largely rejected. Paradigmatically, the extreme position of logical positivists is that given enough information about any physical or social system—and a sufficient understanding of the causal laws—scientists can predict the position of all actors in the system at any point in the future. The world is nothing more than a highly complex, multidimensional billiards game. The difficulty is that such a commitment to prediction simultaneously undermines a commitment to human agency. If we can predict what every element of the system will do in the future, what room does that leave for human will?

It should be acknowledged that this is a simplified caricature of positivism; there are few, if any, social scientists who hold such a position. However, this thought experiment does place in stark contrast the logical consequences of one particular paradigmatic commitment.

## Organization and Content of the Book

With this background in mind, the remaining task of this first chapter is to give a brief description of what will be covered and how we'll proceed through the remainder of the book.

Structurally, the book is organized into three distinct parts. These parts focus on providing a brief introduction to the field, presenting a rough historical sketch of OT, revealing how the major theories deal with several practical managerial and organizational functions, and finally, suggesting ways in which emerging post-traditional theories might offer new and promising opportunities.

This chapter provides an introduction and orientation to OT as well as an overview of the approach and content of the book.

### ***Part I: Theories of Organization***

Part I (Chapters 2–4) presents a historical overview of the development of OT. Each chapter presents a collection of theorists and theories that represent the dominant lines of thought during the time period, the contributions that these theories add to the understanding of organizations, and description of current examples of their influence. Each chapter also includes a shorter description of “other voices” that emerged at roughly the same time. These other voices represent alternative discourses, paradigms, or orientations to the mainstream thinking. The chapters in Part I each include cases that reveal how the concepts and ideas from each chapter have been expressed in real-world governance institutions.

**Chapter 2—Classical Foundations: The Historical Context of a New Field of Study:** Explores early organization and management theories including ideal types of bureaucracy and authority, principles of scientific management, and early approaches to the systematic study and practice of management. The other or alternative voice in this period is drawn from the work of Mary Parker Follett and notions of the law of the situation and power with rather than power over.

**Chapter 3—Behavioral Revolution:** Examines the alternatives developing out of and in response to classical approaches to organizations. The historical developments followed in this chapter start with the Hawthorne experiments and Chester Barnard's ideas and trace their innovations into a wide range of work done following the Second World War, including human relations theories (HRTs), Herbert Simon's work on bounded rationality and satisficing, and concluding with the development of systems theory. Other voices in this period are represented by the emergence of institutionalism and other structural functionalist thinking as well as Dwight Waldo's normative challenges in public administration.

**Chapter 4—Life after Berger and Luckmann—A Theoretically Diverse World:** Introduces the idea of social construction in OT and then summarizes several of the ontologically diverse theories of organization that have emerged from contemporary thinking about organizations. Particular attention is given to two economic theories of organization—transaction cost economics and agency theory and their influence on thinking about public organizations. Other theories examined include chaos and complexity theories, resource dependence and contingency theories, and network theory. The chapter also gives attention to more constructivist or interpretivist theories such as sensemaking.

## ***Part II: Issues, Strategies, and Tactics***

The focus of Part II (Chapters 5–8) shifts from a historical overview of the emergence of major organizational theories to the application of those theories to broad areas of organizational activity. Attention is given to how each theory included helps the reader to understand the activity; the assumptions that underpin the theories being examined; benefits and limitations of the theory's application; and Current Expressions, or case examples of the theory as applied in contemporary governance organizations.

**Chapter 5—Managing Individual Behavior:** This chapter reviews many of the dominant approaches to managing individual behavior. It explores and compares assumptions about motivations and incentives and connects them to historical and contemporary management approaches.

**Chapter 6—Understanding and Shaping Group Dynamics:** Chapter 6 shifts its level of analysis from the individual to the group and examines different approaches to understanding formal and informal mechanisms of group development including the development of social norms, organization culture, and institutional dynamics.

**Chapter 7—Affecting Organization Change:** With concepts of individual and group dynamics in mind, this chapter examines a range of approaches for initiating and managing intentional effective organization change. The chapter gives attention to the role of organization development (OD) approaches, participation, and leadership-centered changes.

**Chapter 8—Managing Organization-Environment Relations:** The final chapter in Part II again shifts levels of analysis and examines approaches organizations might use to manage their relationship with a wider environment including clients, citizens, regulators, legislators, political executives, and others.

## ***Part III: Toward Post-Positivist Organizations***

The final part of the book intentionally shifts its attention to post-positivist thinking and applications. This final section introduces many of the critical and affirmative aspects of post-positivist thinking and explores ways to apply these aspects in real settings of contemporary organizations.

**Chapter 9—Escaping the Void: History of Post-Positivism:** This chapter presents a brief introduction to the history and heterodox thinking that has emerged in the past twenty years with an emphasis on their appearance in public administration. Chapter 9 also connects back to Part I in demonstrating how elements of the “other voices” identified in the first part of the book can be traced to post-traditional theory.

**Chapter 10—Learning to Fly: Applying Post-Positivist Theory:** The second chapter in Part III turns its attention to an exploration of how post-positivist theories can be, and in some cases already are being, applied in organizations involved in governance. The intention of this chapter is severalfold. First, it demonstrates that post-positivist theory is applicable in useful rather than narrowly esoteric ways. It reveals how the theory and application may not constitute a radical departure from existing practice but still differs in subtle but important ways. Finally, it suggests new and emerging opportunities to further apply post-traditional theory in ways that support governance organizations and broader democratic society.

**Chapter 11—Conclusion: This Is the Beginning:** The final chapter of the book returns to several of the themes introduced in this chapter and commends readers not to adopt any particular approach to organizations but rather to embrace a reflexive and flexible attitude. The chapter also further explores implications of traditional and post-traditional OT for democratic processes in an increasingly complex and diverse society.

## Diving In

There are two last comments we want to make before you leap headfirst into the book and its ideas. One is that because many of these ideas are likely to be new to you, give yourself plenty of time to read and reflect. Give some thought, for example, to how the ideas you read about appear in organizations you're familiar with and what factors or attributes support or hinder that application. Toward that end, we posed a range of reflection and discussion questions throughout all of the chapters. that can be used to prompt the sort of consideration and reflection we have in mind or that can be used to generate discussion in the classroom. Try to use these—and other questions that come to your mind as you read—to inform and extend your consideration of the ideas we introduce.

We also want to note that while we think the order and structure of the book is well suited to building a formidable and useful understanding of OT, it is certainly possible to arrange or rearrange the readings into other orders or in other arrangements that support grasping the ideas just as effectively as our framework. For example, one might use the chapters in Part II to structure reading of the book and supplement the reading of Chapters 5 through 8 with selected readings from chapters in Part I and even Part III. Regardless of the approach you use, at this point, we invite you to dive in and see where your exploration leads you. We encourage you, as a student of OT, to follow your curiosity and see where it leads you through the Contents and Index. Don't hesitate to read ahead or look back to material you've already covered. OT and organization practice are endlessly fascinating areas to study. We hope that you find that study as useful and interesting as we do. ■

## Notes

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