

Assignment 1: Internal Conversations

Employees, Leadership, and Organizational Culture

The concept of “street-level bureaucracy” highlights an interesting dilemma in regards to how organizations can simultaneously show respect towards, acknowledge autonomy of, and require accountability of street-level bureaucrats. Lipsky’s analysis of street-level bureaucracy interested me on many levels because I was able to draw parallels between it and my work in state government; however, it was this interaction between street-level bureaucrats and management or policy makers that I found most interesting because I did not recognize it until reading Lipsky. Lipsky brings up a very important point about the street-level bureaucrat, which is that he or she cannot easily be evaluated. Because of the personal and one-on-one nature of their work with clients and civilians, it is hard to observe their work without compromising it. This has implications for clients, the organization, and overall policy. For example, if they cannot be observed, how can effective treatment methods be replicated? When working in the state government, I heard how organizations that successfully re-housed homeless families oftentimes were able to do so because of strong caseworkers. Maybe strong caseworkers are an effect of a successful organization and not the cause, but, regardless, understanding why they are deemed effective and strong is important in the larger context. (Lipsky 1980)

Treating good leadership, similar to good case managers, as an effect rather than a cause of successful programs is different than what I have heard and assumed in the past about organizations, and it is a fascinating evaluation approach for this reason. Like many, I have thought that good leadership is the cause of success, and this has been troublesome because it leaves one in the position to think that success is not reproducible. Tandler asks, “what was it about this particular program that drew good leadership to it? What enabled this leader to enact

his vision? What institutional and political supports... made his work possible?" These are important questions because they recognize that strong leaders may need additional supports and not all projects or organizations are able to attract and/or keep strong leadership. It may be more difficult to identify who will be a strong leader before he or she begins work and actually easier to build an environment that will attract this leadership. For example, providing enthusiastic staff may encourage good leadership because the leader will feel supported. (Tendler 1998)

The role that modest employee turnover plays in increasing organizational learning was initially counterintuitive for me, but soon made sense in the context of how organizational code adapts to individual beliefs. March states, "a modest level of turnover, by introducing less socialized people, increases exploration, and thereby improves aggregate knowledge." On one hand, this is interesting to me because it is not how I viewed things before. Previously, I tended to think that turnover was a barrier to improving aggregate knowledge because of the training and time required for a new employee to "learn the ropes." On the other hand, this makes sense in the context of interns. People often say that interns bring new ideas and life to organizations, even though they are only there for a short time. March's theory is useful for understanding why employees with experience and long tenure in one organization do not necessarily increase organizational learning and may in fact just be adding redundant knowledge. (March 1991)

As I read about the Eco-Police officers, I became interested in how employee turnover, job ladders, applicant characteristics, and organizational structure can impact neighborhoods disproportionately. More specifically, I found it problematic that most new environmental officers are assigned to New York City since that is where the new job openings are, and that most transfer out when they have the opportunity to do so. Navarro mentions high cost of living in New York City as one factor for this, and I assume that people interested in becoming Eco-

Police may come from rural environments, like Officer Neil R. Stevens, to which they want to return. The potential problem is that a whole region, New York City, is being served by officers who are both inexperienced and want to transfer, which may very well lead to inferior service and lower levels of respect and trust between officers and the community. (Navarro 2009)

While some organizational structures facilitate the movement of employees within an organization, the population that Wilson highlights at one point is really interesting because it is comprised of employees who remain, or survive, in tough or undesirable jobs because of peer expectations and solidarity. I find this interesting because I always assumed that people enlist in the military and voluntarily go into combat because 1) they want to serve their country and/or 2) they need a job. It never consciously occurred to me that the reason people stay in these jobs is largely due to peer support. As I think back to my own work, it makes sense even though I was never in physically dangerous environments. I once worked in an environment that was emotionally taxing, and a large reason why I did not leave was because of the lower-level employees with whom I worked. The support that these fellow employees provide became invaluable, and I even wound up learning a lot about the field from them. (Wilson 1989)

Bureaucracy, Process, and Evaluation

I witnessed part of a procurement process this summer at the state level, but I never questioned how unnecessarily bureaucratic the process was until I read Kelman's book. While he focuses more on large-scale procurement, such as that in the military, and I witnessed a much smaller procurement process at the state level for services, it was striking how many similarities I noticed. The procurement process that I witnessed involved a Request for Responses (RFR) that was posted by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for services connected to homelessness prevention and re-housing. Before it was posted, it went

through many people to ensure that all legally required components were included, such as scoring criteria and requirements for the hiring of minority businesses. Once it was posted, there were many procedural requirements and restrictions. For example, no individual organization was allowed to be notified of its posting, no questions could be answered by email or phone, and questions could only be submitted in writing, which would be answered at the bidders' conference and published. Finally, organizations or municipalities would only be chosen based on the scoring criteria, not on reputation or even the overall strength of their submission not captured in the scoring criteria. These are just some of the many guidelines and requirements that I witnessed, but did not really question at the time. While these requirements certainly seemed to even the playing field to some extent, Kelman's book alerted me to how arbitrary, excessive, and, to some extent, limiting, they really were. (Kelman 2005)

March acknowledges that there is inherent value in process, sometimes regardless of outcome, which is interesting because it explains why some organizations make their process more difficult or seem to work towards a goal through a burdensome process, such as the procurement process. Specifically, this inherent value can be symbolic and help organizations convey their "good values" based on the decisions they make. Similarly, organizations can gain legitimacy by following an appropriate decision making process. This resonates with both Kelman's article and my work this summer helping to draft and put out the RFR. It was really important that no organization be preselected or be subjected to more lenient rules for fear that the selection process be viewed as biased. This was because, if the selection process was viewed as biased, it could be subjected to scrutiny and any subsequent failure could be attributed to this act. Another way in which this emphasis on decision making played out was that it resulted in more people than necessary being brought to the table to help make decisions because that

symbolized a more unified and thoughtful process. I definitely recognize in this work the significance and symbolism of process that March identifies. (March 1981)

Witnessing this procurement process and then reading about maximizing versus satisficing, I tried to determine which approach the organization was taking and had difficulty putting it in one category versus the other, which March acknowledges is common. His reframing of decision making for me was really interesting because it helped me understand how the initial part of the process primarily involved maximizing and then, as the deadline approached, it devolved to satisficing (note: satisficing is not always negative). As Marsh states, “when participants talk about the process, they seem generally to accept the ideology of maximization, but their descriptions sound a lot like satisficing.” I think this is because, ideally, people want to maximize, and they try to at first with big decisions, but it can be impossible when various decisions simultaneously compete for the decision maker’s attention. (March 1994)

The reports required by donor agencies in Nepal raise an important question regarding the process of government and non-profit financing: how do governments and agencies measure effectiveness and efficiency, maintain accountability, and determine how best to allocate funds while not creating excessive and unnecessary reporting requirements of small regions or organizations? As I read about the duplicative and excessive reporting requirements of donor agencies in Nepal, I, again, thought about the RFR that DHCD put out this summer along with some other reports that came into the department. The responses were written by organizations and municipalities across the state to apply for funding for homelessness prevention and re-housing. In addition to this source of funding, the same organizations had to apply for a couple different federal funding sources just to continue operating on a yearly basis. The responses to the abovementioned RFR were due August 24, 2009, and I remember hearing that the same

agencies would have to write at least two other significant proposals within the next two months for the other sources of funding. They would also have to report their results on a quarterly basis. At the time, this seemed excessive, especially for non-profit organizations with limited funding and staff. Yet, I did not see how to get around this excessive and duplicative process without major coordination across national and state offices. It seems unreasonable to suggest that donor organizations should adapt to the culture and schedule of each grantee, but the current system clearly is not ideal. This leads me to question, with limited resources, time, and staff, how can all parties adapt to each other to create more efficient and effective programs that also incorporate some level of evaluation? (Justice 1986)

Development and Organizational Change

While the broader argument that Roe makes for improving development narratives or counternarratives is interesting, the piece of his article that I was most drawn to was his analysis of the development narrative titled “land registration and increased agricultural productivity” because it presented a view different than any I have read in the past. After reading works promoting land registration and titles, such as that of Hernando de Soto, I often questioned its uniform effectiveness beyond protecting people from displacement. What was interesting about reading a critique of this development narrative was that it identified ways in which the narrative does not produce the desired results, but these were different than the reasons I questioned land registration. I had thought that the two main risks associated with land registration were: 1) farmers would sell their land once they received a land title and then would not be able to afford to buy other land, and/or 2) farmers would borrow against their land and not be able to pay back their loans and lose their land. Therefore, I found it really interesting to read about how land registration can encourage landowners to take credit out for non-agricultural investments or to

leave land idle because the fear of it being used by others is reduced. In regards to the broader applicability of Roe's argument, I like how he is practical and asks, assuming the narrative will persist regardless of evidence of its ineffectiveness, can policy makers attention be focused on the "few topics where land registration offers some promise of actually expanding agricultural production," such as a progressive land tax in the case of the Kenya. This is similar to what Profs. Salvucci and Tunney spoke about recently when they said that, as planners, we have to question when to try to get rid of poor planning tools (such as urban renewal), and when to try to use *parts* of them to further our planning goals. (Roe 1991)

Given that new formation of states is not particularly common, I was pleased to learn that Goldsmith's analysis on how "sizable but comparatively well-managed bureaucracies" can support development can be applied to new organizations, such as the National Revenue Secretariat in Ghana. I think is interesting in context of new departments that recently have been formed at the national (e.g. the Office for Urban Affairs Policy) and the state (e.g. MA Department of Transportation) level. While establishing or renovating an organization may seem like a small feat in comparison to renovating an entire state bureaucracy, I think it is very encouraging and somewhat counterintuitive that such a shift could be accomplished. When one considers how influenced organizations and government departments are by the external bureaucratic environment, it is remarkable to think that change can be accomplished at this level in spite of resistance, or lack of change, in the broader environment. (Goldsmith 1999)

Along these lines of achieving change in manageable increments, Tendler's evaluation of rural development projects in Northeast Brazil is interesting because it made me question whether there is a general tendency for organizations and government departments to take on too many issues and projects at once. While Tendler focuses more on the "taking over" aspect

associated with successful projects, I am particularly interested in the first four themes she associates with improved performance—1) completion in a shorter time period than planned, 2) simplification of the original project, 3) elevation of one or two projects, 4) easier tasks—because they present a potential framework through which to rethink planning. Oftentimes in planning, people, including myself, get bogged down with how interconnected issues are and how one cannot address one socioeconomic issue without simultaneously addressing the many others that contribute to it (e.g. housing, education, health, transportation, and employment are interconnected). Maybe breadth and scope should be sacrificed for a higher chance of success in some instances, which will lead to greater overall success in the long run. (Tendler 1993)

Fox's account of the rural food distribution program in Mexico, along with class discussions and Tendler's readings, has made me view program success in a new light in regards to life after the program. To be more specific, just because a program or organization ceases to exist under its original name, or even in its original form, it does not mean that it ceases to continue to be effective and influential in some capacity. In the case of Mexico described by Fox, "it was by no means clear that CONASUPO-COPLAMAR would survive the end of López Portillo's administration. Both SAM and COPLAMAR went down with him, but the rural food distribution program quietly became DICONSA-Rural, and it continued to increase in importance." Fox presents a great example of how an organization can create something larger, and with greater lasting power, than itself. This is useful when thinking about grants and, currently, stimulus funds. There is concern about what will happen when the stimulus funds are cut off in three years, and, while I believe there is reason for concern, this gives hope that short-term funding can help build a foundation that will eventually become self-sustaining. (Fox 1992)

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