

# Outlandish Perspectives on Public Administration

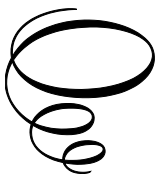


# Outlandish Perspectives on Public Administration

By

Charles T. Goodsell

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**Dedicated to  
Holly,  
Amanda  
and Rupert**



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## PREFACE

I confess the title of this book containing twelve of my past articles borders on the whimsical. I chose it not to be amusing but rather accurate. As I look back on my career inventory of 40 or so peer-reviewed essays, I detect a quite amazing degree of miscellaneous exploration. Their degree of individual differentiation seems well within the usual dictionary definition of “outlandish” as strange, odd or even bizarre.

Another reason for the choice crept into my thinking. Taking the word apart literally exposes a possibly unifying feature: they are the work of an outlander, i.e. foreigner. As a scholar I confess to always being a free spirit. I was not confined by the bounds of my doctoral training in political science. In articles I never attempted to replicate my own work or that of others. The succession of trendy “hot” areas of study that pass through all academic fields was largely ignored.

Instead, I followed the unpredictable calls of my own curiosity. This meant always being ready in the next project to explore a fresh idea, cross a disciplinary boundary or two, and take a chance on thereby discovering something interesting on the other side.

Admittedly, these habits at times irritated the owners of others’ sacred research precincts. However, I am pleased to say, my colleagues and department heads over the years were always generous to encourage their outlandish brother and not try to rein him in. Query: Would it do any harm to encourage the present-day’s new scholars to be let loose to explore foreign lands too?

Readers will note the twelve selections were originally published over several decades. The earliest is from 1976, the most recent from 2021. While I am no way ashamed of my innocent youth, I found myself wanting to update and fill a gap here and there. Hence I have prepared a brief introduction to each pair of original articles. On occasion I have also rewritten a particularly boring or useless piece of text, labeled as such. Postscripts allow a follow-up comment or explanation.



# SEEKING FULFILLMENT

## INTRODUCTION

As the title of this introductory comment suggests, these first two articles are normative in nature. They aim toward higher levels of intellectual attainment than previous thinking contemplates. Conventional fulfillment criteria such as efficiency, economy and effectiveness are left behind as banal generalities. Past preoccupation with the organizational features of bureaucracy is ignored.

The first article was written just prior to completion of this book. It concerns the idea whereby some fields of academic study are seen as not new-knowledge discoverers alone, but also supporters of a linked practical profession. Examples are law enforcement and public health. I remind readers that even though public administration was founded as a subdivision of the discipline of political science, as an applied field it possesses a responsibility to support and improve the operations of government and its involved networks.

I introduce myself here via my books, not my essays.

The next article was stimulated by finding out that U.S. Department of Interior insiders regard the National Park Service to be by far the best of its many bureaus. This unanticipated signal sent me off on a long scholarly journey to find out why. In the process I modeled an agency whereby a pervasive belief system tightly embraces the organization and its members. Other scholars have written about effective motivation systems and auras of excellence, but none capture all of the ingredients I identify.

## CHAPTER ONE

# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SCHOLARSHIP: REVISITING THE APPLIED FUNCTION, 2021

*American Review of Public Administration*, 51, No. 7  
(October): 489-491

After sixty years of writing about public administration, I have thoughts looking back that I would like to share with others doing public administration scholarship. I hope these comments may stimulate thinking among veteran researchers and newcomers too.

Public administration, like architecture, journalism and social work, is an *applied* field of study. This means its purpose is not just the accumulation and transfer of knowledge in its own secured realm. It is also an educator, cultivator, and promoter of its linked profession. This distinguishes it from self-contained academic disciplines like mathematics, literature or philosophy, whose prime audiences are other specialists in these fields.

Confusion on this point stems from the fact that in the American academy, public administration was first conceived as a subdivision of political science. When political scientists recognized the teaching and research opportunities that governmental actions present, PA's separate subdivision status began to vanish. A consequence was loss of a conscious responsibility for its applied responsibilities. Hence I propose a general reestablishment of our applied role. This would be accomplished most easily via public administration's teaching and consulting functions. Yet I urge that our scholarship role be used as well. In this Trumpian era of hatred of government the public service needs all the support, legitimation and fresh ideas it can get.

Hence, I submit, public administration scholars should, when they are so moved, think of themselves as being allies and partners of the millions of men and women who do the work of the people under the cloak of law

and the public interest. To that end they might do this naturally or, alternatively, deliberately frame arguments in favorable ways.

Critics in the professorship could well take umbrage at this proposal. The idea could be seen as naive, anti-intellectual and limiting to the tone of one's scholarship. As a researcher who himself prizes his independence and freedom, I can fully understand this attitude. In response, I make three points. First, finding fault—the precursor to identifying a problem—is itself a license to criticize and offer an answer. Second, if the change saves taxpayer money, we are automatically on the side of the angels at all points on the political spectrum. Third, keep in mind that Pete Buttigieg's Transportation Department is handing out infrastructure innovation contracts.

## **The Author's Personal Research Experience**

I must confess that up to the composition of this essay I have not paid attention to the applied aspect of my public administration scholarship. This is so despite the fact that out of my 11 sole authored volumes, 10 pertain in some way to governmental administration. In the past several months I have been pondering what these works might possess in terms of supporting administrative practice. On the following pages I first summarize these works, then analyze them for possible applied conclusions.

### ***Administration of a Revolution***

The idea behind my first book, *Administration of A Revolution* (1965), was the consequence of a chance encounter at the library of the University of Puerto Rico where I had obtained my first teaching job. One day I was searching in the Puerto Rican Collection with the thought of launching a book project of some kind on the island's history. When scanning through records of the colonial period, Emilio Colón, director of the collection, asked what I was looking for. He warned me that the archaic Spanish script would be impossible to understand, and then proceeded to show me an edited volume on the 1941-1946 Rexford Tugwell governorship of the Island. This was a period of historic political and administrative reform that was accomplished by appointed Governor Tugwell in partnership with the future elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. Colón read with gusto from a page and said, "Now that's public administration!" I followed up this lead and spent the next two years writing a history of the reforms. At one point Lady Luck bestowed another gift when Tugwell himself retired to the island

and moved into a house across the street from my apartment. We eventually became friends, although he never agreed to read my manuscript.

### ***The Case for Bureaucracy***

In 1966 I joined the political science faculty at Southern Illinois University (Tugwell had spent a year there and recommended me). As the 1970s began unfolding I had been noticing a number of empirically-based academic articles that portrayed government bureaucracy favorably, unlike the standard criticism.

Then at a political science conference in Tennessee I noticed a lone publisher's book display consisting of a nearly empty table manned by a single person. This was Edward Arminian, a single publishing entrepreneur who was trying to launch Chatham House in his garage in Chatham, New Jersey. We struck up a conversation and he asked if perchance I was currently writing a book. I said no but mentioned I had noticed this recent new trend in public administration research. Without losing a beat he responded with "you mean the case for bureaucracy." I said I guess so, although not under that title. He responded with a demand for an outline within 5 days. I complied, and from this incident four polemic editions of *The Case for Bureaucracy* plus a later less polemic version came out over the next thirty years (1983-2014).

### ***Social Meanings of Government Buildings***

In 1982, after publishing a book on Peru that did not deal with public administration (1974), I was at a conference in Dallas. During a rest from meetings on Saturday another conferee, Edward Loucks, and I were strolling around the downtown. We passed the city's imposing modernistic city hall, and Edward urged me to go in with him and see the council chamber. Its dramatic size, curved walls, amphitheater seating and electronic podium impressed me with hidden but strident messages about the nature of political power.

I decided almost immediately afterwards to write a book on such spaces. After studying 75 city halls around the country, it was published as *The Social Meaning of Civic Space* (1988). After it came out Professor James Mayo of the School of Architecture and Urban Design of the University of Kansas recommended I do a similar analysis of state capitols. After personally studying the buildings of 49 states (with Alaska added later), I



produced another volume on the social meanings of statehouse public architecture, *The American Statehouse* (2001). Several years later I sought support to write a third “social meaning” volume on the U.S. Capitol in Washington. I approached my senior Senator for endorsement and a pass to the building, but he refused. My luck in this research direction had seemingly run out. In view of the long drawn-out construction of the underground visitor center (and later the Trump-inspired insurrection on January 6, 2021), it is actually fortunate I had not begun such an arduous task.

### *Mission Mystique*

Meanwhile on October 27, 2003 Lady Luck took me in yet another direction. James Ortiz, a former student and senior executive in the Department of Interior, arranged a tour for me of the several bureaus of Interior. On it I made inquiries on which bureau was considered the best one among them. The result was a unanimous vote for the National Park Service. I was not expecting such a decisive verdict. While driving home to Blacksburg that afternoon I began asking myself why. To find out I conducted a study of the NPS in comparison to other federal agencies. The outcome was a complex set of 9 criteria that I eventually translated into a 3x3 matrix called “mission mystique.” A book that spelled out the degree of possessing the factors led to *Mission Mystique: Belief Systems in Public Agencies* (2011).

The criteria were tested against 6 agencies, 4 at the federal level and one each at the state and county levels. All reflected a significant degree of mystique but I also uncovered serious shortcomings in each that were fully explained to readers.

The first agency tackled was the one that inspired the book, the National Park Service. It was at the time of writing laboring under the influence of a hyper-conservative Secretary of the Interior, and her appointed director demanded policies in that vein. They included overturning a ban on religious signboards visible on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and insisting on placement of a book on Creationism in its bookstore. More generally, the NPS had to fight to keep the mission promise of conserving the parks for future generations from being suspended if violations could be reversed. In learning about this organization, luck visited once again; I was given years of real-time access to the employee hotline and able to talk

personally with famed former director George Hartzog at his home prior to his passing in 2008.

My second Mission Mystique agency was the National Weather Service. Here I had an opportunity to interview its Director several times (including after he retired) as well as the administrator of my local weather station. Two main impressions emerged: one was the technical brilliance of modern weather forecasting and the other a major bureaucratic battle NWS was in against the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), its holding organization in the Commerce Department.

NOAA's Administrator was at the time a retired Vice Admiral whose ego was matched only by that of the retired Air Force General that headed the NWS. The Admiral, anxious to make NOAA—formed in 1970 as a mere reorganization device—as famous as NASA, lost no opportunity to minimize the Weather Service, dating from 1870, which dominated his portfolio. Its official name was changed to “NOAA's National Weather Service” and the General's official title became “Assistant Administrator for Weather Services.” To run his shop the General had to navigate a bevy of control hoops, including a complex Program Planning and Integration process in which he had to defend his budget before a NOAA executive committee rather than a congressional appropriation committee. The General was forbidden to testify on the Hill unless accompanied by a NOAA escort to make sure no end runs were tried.

Next is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This organization was difficult to penetrate from the outside except on a superficial level. Its Director at the time disliked criticism of any kind and created an office whose duty was to minimize unflattering public comment. Eventually I overcame this barrier by gaining access to its employee hotline and making contact with the reporter for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* who had the CDC beat. I talked to her on the phone and she subsequently made it possible to download all her relevant articles.

The principal problem to surface was that the Director, in her desire to make the CDC the most prominent public health center in the world, took steps so ambitious that they alienated the disease scientists that had already made it an invaluable asset. This was set off by a “future initiative” of importance she compared to the moon landing. The idea would make America into a “Healthiest Nation” that will lead the way for every nation to follow. To move in this direction she created, on top of the nine existing

National Centers implicit in the agency's name that housed the working laboratories, four "Coordinating Centers." These served as budget and management staff units to which the scientists—used to running their own programs—would now report. Soon scores of world-class disease professionals had quit or were planning to do so. Only the election of Barack Obama and the appointment of a new director saved the CDC from self-destruction.

The remaining three Mission Mystique agencies experienced parallel problems. The Virginia State Police, considered one of the best such forces in the East for its political independence, suffered a stain on its reputation when an irresponsible governor demanded that a police helicopter transport him to Virginia's horse country for a gala social at a private estate. Mission values were questioned from attempts to compromise what the Park Service called a "future generations" commitment.

Similarly, just as the organizational status of the Weather Service was threatened by NOAA, the very existence of the Peace Corps was threatened for ten years by ACTION, created by Nixon to overshadow the famous Kennedy creation. The problem of unsuitable leadership at the CDC is mirrored by the appointment of an inexperienced and unsympathetic outsider as head of the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, previously run by a highly creative Californian. After a few bad years, she too was replaced by a competent professional.

### ***Outstanding Public Servants***

My most recent book is *Public Servants Studied in Essay and Image* (2019). It was written after I discovered all existing books on the careers of public administrators deal with prominent, well known individuals. I thought it only just to do one on the bureaucrats that actually do the daily work of government. I tried something novel and used two media: a one page text and a 15-20 minute video. Seven are men and 5 are women. Two are of color. On the level of the federal system where they work, 2 are at the national level, 4 state level, 3 county level and 3 city level.

Unlike the previous book's use for this article, what stood out here was not problems to be solved but initiatives taken to improve results. In the law enforcement area, Adam Price, an ATF special agent, has become such an expert on southern border gun running that he became involved in top intelligence briefings and diplomacy with Mexico. Michael Bender, a

captain in the Richmond police department, established a new Crisis Intervention program. Stephanie Pechura, the operations administrator of a rehab prison for ex-sex offenders, introduced to her facility reforms in recreation, education, handicrafts, food handling and mural painting. A county juvenile probation officer, Keith Grupposo, spearheaded a policy of diverting many arrested young men of promise away from the court system to conditional release for community service.

In the area of natural resource management, Cindy Berndt, originally hired as a secretary, became the key expert on regulation rules for all Virginia environmental programs, hence indispensable to political appointees and career professionals alike. Karen Wilson, a policy adviser in the Kentucky governor's office, is responsible for developing energy ideas for a state that is dependent on cheap power to retain its automobile industry. A man whose first work for the City of Richmond was mowing its park grass, Howard Glenn now keeps the capital inhabitable by maintaining the vast sanitary and stormwater systems and four miles of flood wall along the James River. Meanwhile, in the headwaters of the James, the Ranger of the Eastern District of the Jefferson National Forest, Daniel McKeague, is applying Forest Service policies to the tree covered mountains and meadows of Appalachia. This requires balancing decisions for and against timber harvesters, pipeline builders, environmental activists, community leaders and hikers on the Appalachian Trail.

Finally in the realm of community wellbeing, Daniel Riccio is co-founder of a distinctive code enforcement program of Charleston, South Carolina. This involves a "livability" bureau and court which assure the community's magnificent homes and streets remain in the finest condition. Kathy Robertson administers Virginia's statewide homeless activities. Accepting the challenge of a governor to reduce this problem by a third in four years, she met the goal by applying the national "Housing First" doctrine to a decentralized system of hundreds of local and regional Continuum of Care organizations. Carla Holloman is a social worker in the Mecklenburg DSS where she is an expert in foster care placement and adoption arrangements for children that need these services. At present she supervises the department's crucial 24/7 domestic abuse staff who can be dispatched at a moment's notice.

At the time of writing Jeffrey Richardson was County Manager of Cleveland County, North Carolina. In that position he sparked construction of a new municipal campus devoted to health and human services and

cultural activities. An economic development partnership was launched that offers utility-connected building shells and pads, post performance tax grants, and high school and community college technology skill certificates. In 2017 Richardson was hired away from Cleveland by Albemarle County in Virginia.

### *Testing the Applied Contributions*

The volume on Puerto Rico was a history. Hence its impact is in the form of retaining lessons from the past that seem germane for the present. I would include the value of strong political backing for administrative reform by Muñoz Marín and the importance of being able to recognize administrative talent, an ability possessed by Tugwell. Also illustrated is the need to have strong staff units, in this case a policy budget replaced a repressive audit office, a powerful planning body was created and a school of public administration was established (where I taught). The book's translation in Spanish and Arabic widened its audience.

The Case for Bureaucracy series constitutes outright cheerleading for the American public service. In the four editions I was deliberately cherry-picking from the empirical literature. This openly polemic style was meant to break introductory students away from the chronic distrust of government agencies then prevailing. The last "New" edition was meant to add balanced evidence in order to retain the interest of sophisticated readers. The insistence of publishers on churning out multiple editions amplified readership; USIS placed it too in American libraries abroad.

The social meaning of city hall chambers volume was my first serious entry into this specialized topic. Its literature search was a vast undertaking, aided by being a summer visiting fellow at the Center for Advanced Study of the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. My empirical discovery of three successive periods of Traditional, Midcentury, and Contemporary designs laid the basis for endorsing the third seemingly most democratic model. In an extension of this implicit applied gesture, I subsequently published a lengthy monograph for the International City Management Association that laid out explicit design instructions. (Goodsell 1983)

The second architecture volume on state capitols supplies statehouse public relations officials an applied instructional aid when it comes time to go beyond the obvious topics of history, footprint, facade, and style of the

building. This opportunity springs from the hundreds of artifacts displayed in public spaces. Several statehouses boast parlor-style “rooms of state” that contain period furniture, precious rugs, pieces of fine art and battleship silver service sets. Less elitist and more creative are objects like oil rigs, race cars, shoeshine stands and fragments from the Oklahoma City bombing. These infinite ways of projecting a state’s culture are described in detail and pictured in photographs, offering a national inventory of possibilities.

Turning now to the Mission Mystique cases, in each I had many positive things to say, and these favorable reports could be considered as useful if not ringing endorsements. At the same time, in each case at least one serious problem had reared its head. Just pointing this out could be regarded as a form of assistance. However I failed to do so and would have tried only if requested.

Nevertheless as I look back, in each of the six organizations I found myself talking informally at length with one or more persons. These included current or former heads of all agencies save the Peace Corps, many mid-level professionals, and sometimes backbenchers or lobbyists.

One individual I remember particularly was Randolph Adams of the Peace Corps. Despite three-year service limits for volunteers and 5-years for professional staff in that organization, he had made it the centerpiece of his career by “retreading” from intervening outside employment several times. He was a fountain of inside stories and insights, and at the same time seemed to appreciate an empathetic ear. Perhaps that should count some as applied, although mostly in my direction—I got just as much support as he.

The same is largely true with the Public Servants book. The subjects seemed pleased they had been asked to participate in the project. The honor could have solidified their stature with their respective employers, but I doubt they gained any tangible new insight or knowledge.

## **A Final Word**

Summing up, some applied contributions were made to the field by my books, but they were varied and unplanned. Perhaps whatever credit I might claim in this area refers more to my bringing up this subject than contributing to it. To be specific, the Puerto Rico volume provided retrospective insight. Case for Bureaucracy helped foster a general reevaluation of that institution. The city hall book supplied a physical floorplan for more democracy. The

statehouse project created a tool for incorporating state culture. *Mission mystique* set forth a model for agency-inspired governance.

The *Public Servants* volume was different. My final work made me realize that the more we know about a cause, the better we serve it. Public administration can be seen in a different and unaccustomed light—not as a personal interest, not as a field of study, not a public sector, not as bureaucracy, not as an executive branch, not even as a set of organizations; but rather a magnificent tapestry of individual human beings working to earn a living while lending part of their souls to serve others in behalf of all of us.

## Postscript

This recent article replaces an earlier first selection whose style is so discouragingly dense I was afraid it would scare readers away from the fascinating material in the remainder of this book.

## Author's Citations

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## CHAPTER TWO

# MISSION MYSTIQUE: STRENGTH AT THE INSTITUTIONAL CENTER, 2011

***American Review of Public Administration* 41, No. 5  
(August): 475-494**

In his book *On Thinking Institutionally*, Hugh Hecló (2008) explains why institutions are fundamental to human society. Whether one is talking about marriage, law, or baseball, they are social repositories of past precedent and ways of doing things. Institutions can bequeath to successive generations stable referents that give lives meaning beyond self-interest calculation and the latest trend. They also become points of access for successive generations to reshape the social fabric when institutional habits become rigid, corrupt, or repressive.

This article is on the institution of bureaucracy. Viewed as a sociological abstraction or as individual examples, bureaucracy is often denounced unhesitatingly. Yet, as with other classes of institution, it can provide opportunities to each generation. To that end, the pages that follow outline a vision of bureaucracy intended to maximize its institutional contribution to governance. It bears what is called the quality of *mission mystique* and is submitted for consideration as a means of strengthening public administration's institutional center.

### **The Public Agency**

For well over a century, the administrative agency has been and remains the centerpiece of American public administration. It is the only public organizational vehicle available that possesses, at the same time, the following characteristics:

- Has been granted a statutory mandate to perform a public duty;
- Has specialized knowledge, skills and resources to perform that duty full-time;
- Is staffed by career civil servants acting under constitutional oath;
- Is financed by taxpayer-provided funds for which it is held accountable;
- Is ultimately responsible in operations and policy to elected officials;
- Is subject to unlimited external check by multiple authorities.

It is because of this unique triad of assets--authority, resources, and accountability--that thousands of administrative agencies exist at all levels of government. In most governmental jurisdictions, numerous agencies exist, performing an array of duties. In small localities, the duties are also numerous, but the governing entity itself is like one institution.

By translating what citizens and their elected representatives want into concrete reality, administrative agencies make possible the functioning of our modern democratic republic. At the same time, a prime objective of our professional field of public administration is never to be satisfied with the existing quality of governance. The institutions through which we act must be steadily improved. Certainly this is true with direct administration by agencies of their own programs, which has traditionally constituted most of their activity. In recent years, for a number of reasons, agencies have been devolving public functions to nongovernmental actors, such as signatories to government contracts, recipients of government grants and transfers, private entities to which are delegated public authority, and nonprofit organizations that carry out public functions in partnership with government.

This proliferation of devolved public activity has of late dominated the field's literature to the extent it is referred to as the "new governance," even though the old governance by single agencies has by no means disappeared (Lynn, 2010; McGuire & Agranoff, 2010). Indeed, their importance is now even greater because of responsibilities this devolution confers on agencies for the actions of institutions other than themselves. Private, nonprofit, and hybrid organizations performing public duties with public funds must meet the constitutional requirements of public law and representative government. This makes it increasingly necessary that agencies be informed and capable overseers of contractors, grantees, collaborators, and partners with respect to due process of law, equal protection of the laws, fiduciary accountability, and the avoidance of special interest privilege. Whereas public tasks can be farmed out, public accountability cannot be.

Along with oversight responsibilities due to devolution, government agencies must bear the adverse consequences of another trend, threats of defunding government. Large federal budget deficits caused by the financial meltdown, the recession, low taxes, entitlement programs, and costly wars have created a turn to the right in electoral politics. The federal government's debt has become the means by which anti-government conservatives rally popular opinion that supports, at least for the moment, a massive downsizing of the civilian bureaucracy. Leaders in both political parties are demanding extensive federal budget cuts and salary freezes or dismissal of public employees. Cries are also in the air for rolling back long standing regulations and eliminating entire agencies.

This situation creates a second major challenge to the government agency of our time. This is to save from dissolution vital government competencies that give the nation security and prosperity and allow communities to seek a high quality of life for all. Specialized civil and military work forces that have been developed over the decades, and the physical projects of infrastructure that have been the objects of billions in public expenditure cannot be allowed to be deteriorated. Complicating the situation further is the likelihood that as appropriated dollars disappear and staff morale drops, additional steps in the direction of devolution will probably be taken. This makes the task of adequate third-party oversight even larger-and yet agencies will have fewer resources for this purpose. The institutional center of public administration has no choice but to gird its loins, protect that for which it is responsible, and maintain its inner spirit. How might this be possible?

### **Meeting Three Needs**

It is helpful as a first step to define more explicitly what now is needed in public agencies as a result of devolution and defunding, along with filling the gaps in in-house capability that have always existed in government bureaucracy. There are three such areas: (a) mission articulation, (b) workforce continuity, and (c) capacity for change.

*Mission articulation.* One need is to be sufficiently committed to a crystal-clear expression of the agency's mission so that it can be articulated ardently and persuasively. Bland mission statements written by committee that include all activities must be limited to strategic management boilerplate. The time for cavalier assumption of the agency's justifiability is also at an end; its purpose must be emphatically stated and be unmistakably

linked to the contribution it makes to an existing public need. With respect to external actor oversight, this step is necessary to show third parties what values are at the heart of the institution's work. As for warding off defunding threats, crisp mission articulation explains to legislators, the media, and the public precisely what the mission does for the collective good. By implication, this makes clear the adverse effects that would be felt across the country and within the community if the agency's programs are curtailed.

*Workforce continuity.* A second need is to maintain within the agency sufficient workforce continuity and institutional memory for the agency to carry its distinctive competence into the future. This will require an unusually robust organizational culture that is able to retain and recruit personnel based on attractions other than compensation or the opportunities for advancement afforded by mission growth. For external actor oversight, sufficient in-house technical knowledge and experience must be maintained to be able to monitor and evaluate successfully the work of those to whom responsibilities are delegated. The unhappy situation often experienced of being wholly dependent on contractors for decisions on contract renewal must be avoided if possible. Unfortunately, funding cutbacks can lead to fast attrition in the agency's best talent, thus worsening this situation. Moreover, retention of at least the base of a knowledgeable and motivated workforce is essential for maintaining a good reputation despite substantial defunding and will be critical to the rebuilding process once appropriations are restored.

*Capacity for change.* The third need is that the agency show it is not wedded to a gloried past but is facing the future with confidence, creativity, and an innovative spirit. This avoids the stigma of a has-been bureaucracy and asserts the profile of an eager comer in a changing world. Such an image must, however, be backed by actual evidence of having an open culture that is receptive to new ideas and a record of actual experimentation with program improvements. With respect to the oversight function, forward-looking behavior allows the agency to address its dispersed actors and collaborators not as a rigid naysayer that insists on conformity to rules but as a dynamic partner in innovation. In counteracting fiscal hard times, an innovative reputation allows the agency to stand for adoption of new technologies in the search for greater productivity. This places the organization in the position of a self-confident institution that is ready to regroup following the easing of cutbacks.

## The Concept of Mission Mystique

We now examine mission mystique as a model for elevating the public agency to its highest potential generally as well as meeting these mentioned needs. It is an ideal of institutional robustness that the author developed inductively from a study of six premier government agencies conducted between 2005 and 2010 (Goodsell, 2011).

The mission mystique agency is endowed with an aura of positive institutional charisma that is derived from the nature of its mission and how well it is carried out—hence the term mission mystique. It is felt both within and without the organization. To career employees, the mystique fosters a personal commitment to advancement of the mission. To attentive outsiders, it generates admiration and respect.

Mission mystique differs from the more common normative approaches to public administration. It by no means excludes but goes beyond the usual production criteria of sheer efficiency or the attainment of performance targets. Likewise, while recognizing the need for strong leadership at particular moments, it differs from the corporate model whereby the key to success is a “great man” that forces the organization culture to adopt what he sees as essential. Rather, mission mystique is institutional in nature, following Philip Selznick’s definition of “institution” as an organization that moves beyond a rationally designed system for meeting predetermined goals to an organic, evolving entity that accumulates the ways, values, and symbols of its culture over time (Selznick, 1957). As such, the agency becomes not merely an instrumental agent obeying a “principal’s” instructions but an ongoing enterprise that takes on a constitutive value of its own.

Political scientists in particular worry about bureaucratic power and the difficulty of controlling the bureau’s policy influence and delegated powers. In my normative model, the mission mystique agency can innovate freely within bounds but must respect the overtly expressed policy preferences of legislative bodies and political administrations. If it does not, it no longer belongs to my category. Contrary to the impressions of many, research on U.S. bureaucracies shows that typically they seek to follow the wishes of new administrations that come to power (Goodsell, 2004).

*Related views of others.* The contours of mission mystique can be clarified further by comparing it with related ideas of other authors. The

organizational-frame model of Bolman and Deal parallels many of the normative, relational, and ceremonial features of mission mystique. However, instead of integrating these into one prescriptive construct as done here, they present them as separate frames from which to choose (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

James Perry's concept of public service motivation seeks dedicated commitment to government service, as does the mystique concept. Yet the unit of analysis is the attitudes of individual public servants, not the culture of the agency in which they work (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). The purpose of Todd La Porte's high-reliability organization is to provide the closest thing possible to perfect operational certainty under hazardous conditions. Thus constancy is the prime consideration, which differs from the attribute of continuous renewal in mission mystique (La Porte & Keller, 1996).

With respect to observed best practices, in their well-known book *In Search of Excellence*, Peters and Waterman define excellence in terms of intensity of purpose, energized culture, and capacity to change, much as I do interestingly enough. However, the measures by which they select companies to study are quantitative rather than qualitative and moreover corporate in nature, that is, high return on investment and greater market share (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

Adoption of public values are at the heart of Mark Moore's approach to public management, but they are defined by the manager and not the agency mission and culture (Moore, 1995). The "agential" perspective of Gary Wamsley and his colleagues at Virginia Tech (including this author) is similar to mission mystique in that it notes the importance of the agency's institutional knowledge and definition of the public interest. Yet normatively it is based on the Constitution and not the agency's culture (Wamsley et al., 1990). Larry Terry's concept of administrative conservatorship calls for preserving and updating the agency's mission values essential to mission mystique as well--yet lodges this responsibility in the organization's leader, not the institution as a whole (Terry, 2003).

## **The Mission Mystique Belief System**

Underlying the overall attribute of mission mystique is a *belief system*--a coherent web of emotive and cognitive elements that together make possible the mystique aura. At its core is a mission cause that becomes immersed in a mobilizing and supportive culture that produces a shared