

Government 1521
Bureaucratic Politics:
Government, Military,
Social and Economic Organizations

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Lecture 04: Behavioral Theories of
Bureaucracy and Organization

Behavioral Theories of Organization

The Behavioral Tradition of the 1950s and 1960s:

- (1) Emphasis on cognitive limits, not only those of the individual
- (2) Bounded rationality – not stupidity, but limits. Memory limitations, attention constraints.

Interesting thing about bounded rationality analyses is not their emphasis on the bounds. It's their emphasis upon **adaptation** to the bounds.

What are the premises of choice? Agenda, information, attention, memory, perception. Crucial variables in behavioral theory

Behavioral Interpretation of
Standard Operating Procedures

These are adaptive as to high-complexity situations. Often “sub-optimal” when viewed globally (non-contextually) but perhaps optimal in local sense.

Swidler, “Culture in Action: Toolkits and Strategies.”

SUM: culture as toolkit of social responses to localized problems. Much more to be done here.

**March & Simon:
Satisficing and Search**

Organismal satisficing model (conceptually) [*Organizations*, 68]

1. The lower the satisfaction, the more search for alternative programs
2. The higher the expected value of reward, the more search.
3. The higher the expected value of reward, the higher the satisfaction, conditioned on receipt of the reward.
4. BUT, the higher the expected value of reward, the higher the level of aspiration.
5. HENCE, the higher the level of aspiration, the lower the satisfaction, ex post (after receiving reward).

Muddling Through

Lindblom's message like Simon's: High-level rationality not possible.

Example: Decisionmaker charged with inflation policymaking. Instead of global optimization, "an alternative line of attack would be to set as his objective, either explicitly or without conscious thought, the relatively simple goal of keeping prices level." [79]

Rational-Comprehensive (Root)

- 1a. Clarification of values or objectives distinct from and usually prerequisite to empirical analysis of alternative policies.
- 2a. Policy-formulation is therefore approached through means-end analysis: First the ends are isolated, then the means to achieve them are sought.
- 3a. The test of a "good" policy is that it can be shown to be the most appropriate means to desired ends.
- 4a. Analysis is comprehensive; every important relevant factor is taken into account.
- 5a. Theory is often heavily relied upon.

Successive Limited Comparisons (Branch)

- 1b. Selection of value goals and empirical analysis of the needed action are not distinct from one another but are closely intertwined.
- 2b. Since means and ends are not distinct, means-end analysis is often inappropriate or limited.
- 3b. The test of a "good" policy is typically that various analysts find themselves directly agreeing on a policy (without their agreeing that it is the most appropriate means to an agreed objective).
- 4b. Analysis is drastically limited:
 - i) Important possible outcomes are neglected.
 - ii) Important alternative potential policies are neglected.
 - iii) Important affected values are neglected.
- 5b. A succession of comparisons greatly reduces or eliminates reliance on theory.

Muddling Through

Key feature in Lindblom's model is costly reversibility of decisions: "Because practitioners of the second [incrementalist or branch] approach expect to achieve their goals only partially, they would expect to repeat endlessly the sequence just described, as conditions and aspirations changed and as accuracy of prediction improved." [80]

Incrementalism and Pluralism

"Note, too, how the incremental pattern of policy-making fits with the multiple pressure pattern. For when decisions are only incremental – closely related to known policies, it is easier for one group to anticipate the kind of moves another might make and easier too for it to make correction for injury already accomplished." [86]

Jones and Baumgartner:
Disproportionate Information Processing

Integrates incrementalism and broader theory of political choice.

Combination of “over-reaction and under-reaction.” Most of the time, no reaction (high threshold.) But when reaction occurs, high level of reaction.

Issues in punctuated equilibrium hypotheses.
Steady state with historical “disruptions.”

Jones and Baumgartner:
Behavioral Model of Individual DM

- Recognition Stage
 - Attend to aspects of the environmental that are potentially problematic
 - Understand problems
 - Prioritize these problems
 - Decide which will be address now, which will be ignored now
- Characterization Stage
 - Construct a “problem space” by determining the relevant attributes of a problem [the problem focused upon from the “recognition stage”
 - Decide the weights of the attributes – which are most relevant (highest weight), which are less, which are irrelevant.

Jones and Baumgartner:
Behavioral Model of Individual DM

- Alternative Stage
 - Given list of attributes from “characterization” stage, for each attribute consider alternative courses of action that might be useful
 - Examine alternatives used in similar problems, recent problems
 - Search for new alternatives
 - Construct “solution spaces” to these problems consisting of the available alternatives; each attribute linked with one or more potential solutions or alternatives.
- Choice Stage
 - Decide which alternative to choose
 - Implement the favored alternative

Jones and Baumgartner: Premises of Choice

Information/Signals

- Has emotive content ("color")
- Ambiguous
- Uncertainty not resolved

[Key distinction: **uncertainty v ambiguity.**]

Uncertainty: lack of knowledge. Only infinite data resolves this. Probability of being wrong always positive with finite data.

Ambiguity: Data subject to differing interpretations or perspectives. [Classic linguistic example: "Among the many leprechauns golfing that day, three of them were **green**."] Other terms: "good," "Undeleteable" [impossible to delete, or possible to undelete?]

Claim [NIE]: Iraq becoming "cause celebre" for terrorists. How to interpret?

Jones and Baumgartner: Premises of Choice

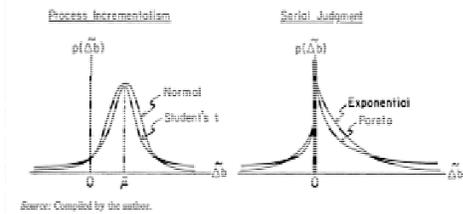
Attention: Constrained and Selective

- "Bottleneck" of short-term memory
- Induces competition: attend to issue X, then at some point, less attention to issue Y.
- Attention Constraints generate disproportionality: "delay, then over-react."
- "...there is no one-to-one correspondence between the severity of problems in the decision-making environment and the policy responses of government. Information processing in politics is disproportionate; it is disjoint and episodic; it is stasis interrupted by bursts of innovation." [20]

Jones and Baumgartner: Cognition and Agenda-Setting

"...policymakers are constantly bombarded with information of varying uncertainty and bias, not on a single matter, but on a multitude of potential policy topics. The process by which information is prioritized for action, and attention allocated to some problems rather than others, is called **agenda-setting**. Agenda setting can be viewed as a process by which a political system processes diverse incoming information streams." [*Politics of Attention*, ix]

Alternative Distributions of Budget Change under Two Models of Incrementalism: Predicted **Leptokurtosis**



Source: Compiled by the author.

Figure 2. Graphical Display of Incrementalism versus Serial Judgment Distributional Predictions

GARBAGE CAN THEORY

Derives from Cohen, March and Olsen article of 1972. Developed more conceptually in Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. See also Padgett, "Managing Garbage-Can Hierarchies" *ASQ* (1982)

CAVEAT: Bendor, Moe and Shotts (2002) show that the computational model is wrong, and provide a critique. This makes Padgett more valuable and illustrative.

Basic concept: organized anarchies.

- (1) Problematic preferences
- (2) Unclear technology
- (3) Fluid participation

GARBAGE-CAN THEORY

Basic notion: Orgs can be seen as (1) collections of choices looking for DMs, (2) collections of solutions looking for problems, (3) "issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired," (4) DMs looking for work.

Related metaphor from Harrison White, *Chains of Opportunity*: Vacancy chain.

