

## *Wanted: An Organization Product*

"ADMINISTRATION" IS SOMEHOW a respectable word while "co-ordination" seems to be disreputable. Yet administration always proceeds through co-ordination. To co-ordinate is to bring into common action, and this is a reasonably adequate general definition of administration. Administration is thought of popularly in much too simple terms—as management and, increasing the distortion, in the military or authoritarian tradition. Psychologists and administrators alike have come increasingly to realize that management consists much less in giving orders than in inducing or in organizing to secure agreement. When the process is thus understood, orders are seen as the formulation of what has been or will be agreed to. Where the factors are complex, the process unavoidably becomes complex. It is the desire to evade the difficulties inhering in such complexity that leads to the snubbing of co-ordination. The tendency among the uninitiated is to feel that if someone would only issue the proper orders or if only someone were clothed with sufficient authority, there would be no need of co-ordination and everything would become a matter of "simple administration." Yet the fact is that the process of formulating and getting acceptance for the proper orders still would be in considerable part a process of co-ordination.

In its simplest terms, co-ordination begins with consideration of the different interests of two neighboring farmers or two merchants or two industrialists. It goes on to consider differences in interest as between grain farmers and feeders; between cotton farmers and corn farmers; between the butter-making creamery, the cheese plant, the condensory, and the fluid-milk consumers; between the need to cultivate and the need to conserve the soil; between the need of farm people to make money and the need of city people to eat; between the need of bankers to make money and the need of farmers for cheap credit; between the desire of citizens to get help from the

government and the desire of taxpayers to reduce public expenditures; between the desire of some producers to export and the desire of other producers to keep out imports.

These different interests are co-ordinated in a way and to a degree by legislative action. But they remain to be co-ordinated more delicately and more precisely in administration. The practical job of co-ordination begins when Congress provides for a number of bureaus to carry out programs designed to take care of popular needs. The administrative job of co-ordination has its internal, organizational aspects; in other aspects it is a reflection of the necessity of co-ordinating diverse public interests. Administration and co-ordination, whether they are regarded as different things or as very much the same thing are, in a democracy, part of the democratic process. The problems of public administration are by no means wholly self-contained within the organizations of government, although they have strictly internal aspects. The various organizations reflect various popular interests, various popular responses. Co-ordination of the interests, judgments, and attitudes of related governmental organizations is necessary to efficiency, bringing to bear upon the specialized segments of government the organizational interests and technical competences of the whole government. But it is also the democratic process working through administration. It is one of the ways by which the essence of popular attitudes and interests is brought to bear upon and made controlling over the specialized segments of government.

#### *Nature of Co-ordination*

Co-ordination has different aspects and elements on each level of policy and of administration. Starting on any single farm, production and management are inevitably influenced by the judgment of Farm Credit Administration field workers just as they are influenced by the judgment of the local banker. A farmer's management and production decisions similarly are influenced by the AAA, by the Soil Conservation Service, and perhaps by the Farm Security Administration. Each of these agencies makes a specialized effort to help farmers do things they cannot do unaided. Each generally supplements and supports the others, though there occasionally are

exceptions to this rule. It is clear, however, that their activities cannot be co-ordinated on John Q. Smith's farm unless their programs, their policies, and their organizations are first co-ordinated in Washington. Each new docket, each new proposal for making a particular program more useful, must be checked by those responsible for all the others. Otherwise when the new program comes into operation it may cause more harm than good, more confusion than improvement.

Friction and confusion may stem, however, from considerations utterly outside the ken of John Q. Smith, farmer. The Federal government is not and should not be carrying on these programs merely to help John Q. Smith. It must act out of a regard for the welfare of the whole nation. Its only justification for helping John Q. Smith would be that there are so many John Smiths in distress as to alarm the country, or that there are such serious unbalances between our rural and urban economies as to threaten a national breakdown, or that because they have felt themselves neglected by their government all the John Smiths have as a group begun to take action which is in danger of upsetting a lot of distant applecarts, even breeding international ill will.

No government can ever be just a general effort to do whatever John Q. Smith or some other farmer wants done. Whatever is done has to be justifiable as public—that is, governmental—action. Moreover it must be done in a way which can be defended before Congress, in line with the particular legislation Congress enacted dealing with the issue. Congress provides for a systematic though narrow review of all administrative action by the Comptroller General; every farm program must be able to pass that review. Funds must be got in competition with all other programs comprising the national budget; hence every farm program must be able to meet the scrutiny of the Budget Bureau. And if a farm program will have an effect on international trade or foreign relations generally, it must be reasonably acceptable to the State Department as well.

These facts are, of course, only illustrative. What is important is that these tests, all of which have been devised to protect the public interest, have an enormously complex derivation and influence. They are tolerable only because they establish an intricate process of ref-

erence, consultation, and clearance which actually promotes the general welfare. In its formal aspect this is the process of co-ordination. It has to be organized with the greatest of insight and care.

*The Organization of Co-ordination*

To organize the process, responsibility for each type of checking and clearance has to be precisely fixed. Thousands of individual employees acting on their own motion cannot profitably go running to the Comptroller General, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, or the Secretary of State, each to get a ruling on his own particular proposals. They simply must proceed in an organized way.

In the Department of Agriculture, the Office of Land Use Co-ordination, and, though to a lesser degree, the Office of the Solicitor serve, by clearing dockets, to accomplish one important type of co-ordination throughout the Department. Other offices play a similar part. The Office of Budget and Finance handles relationships with the Bureau of the Budget and with the Comptroller General. The Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations handles the departmental relationships with the State Department. With their general background these offices are able to clear many dockets without outside consultation. When outside consultation is necessary, however, they know where to go and how to handle the case. Thus when a docket comes to the secretary with the initials of the Director of Finance, the Director of Foreign Agricultural Relations, the Director of the Office of Land Use Co-ordination, the Solicitor, and the Chief of the initiating Bureau, he knows that he needs to consider it only in terms of his own judgment. The process invariably works regularly and smoothly unless the secretary's office grows lax about requiring these references. When that happens, someone's fingers get burnt rather quickly, and the process is re-established and, mayhap, reinforced.

Co-ordination includes as one of its aspects consultation and communication with the public. For it is not complete without proper reference to public attitudes and expectations. It requires an effort to make each segment of the public realize the interests of all the others. Thus all the concerns of politics are brought to bear on every administrative program.

No great department—that is to say, no bureaucracy—can long be

“isolated” or “removed from the people.” Let John Citizen think he has a grievance against the Soil Conservation Service or the Farm Security Administration; let him mention it to an AAA committeeman, and it will travel far and fast within the department, and it will get a great deal of attention. With thousands of field offices, with Washington executives frequently going to the field and being everywhere exposed to people, with great authority delegated to the field, where it is subjected to local pressures, with millions of letters pouring in on the department annually, with millions of telephone calls, with newspapers looking about critically all the time for things to complain of, with Congressmen getting millions of letters from their constituents, with millions of personal contacts between administrative officials and affected citizens—no big department suffers in the slightest from too little knowledge of how the people feel. Where a contrary impression exists, it is superinduced by critics who resent the fact that the superior knowledge of the bureaucrats keeps their own views from weighing more heavily. Government workers are exceedingly sensitive to popular feeling. Public administrators probably get too many reactions from the people rather than too few, considering the number of reactions that are irrelevant or misconceived because of the remoteness of the reactors from what they are reporting. This is not to say, however, that this overdose entails any serious danger—and it does have whatever merit is represented by the blowing off of steam.

But discussion of administrative issues with the public may slow down the process of consultation and reference, and this is a serious problem. If government officials should attempt to discuss a proposed action with all the groups and individuals in the country who believe they are entitled to be consulted and for as long as they think they should be consulted, government would invariably do too little and always do it too late. Fixing reasonable limits to the process of reference and consultation is necessary because the final purpose is agreement on *action*. Agreement must be sufficient, but for 140,000,000 people it inevitably will be the kind of agreement that is involved in the conception of majority government. It is agreement on a course completely satisfactory to no one but sufficiently acceptable to a majority. Fixing reasonable limits to reference and con-

sultation before action is the more tolerable, also, because the decisions are popularly controllable, subject to change and reversal.

The part played by criticism after a decision has been reached, a program launched, is not sufficiently understood or appreciated. On the whole I am inclined to believe that popular discussion and criticism *after* the fact has greater value than it has before the fact. It is important both before and after, but the earlier debate would profit from greater realization of the importance of the later process. The later criticism, too, would be more valuable if there were less assumption that its occasion reflects governmental stupidity and error. Any decision, any governmental action, will profit from experience, from criticism of a program in action. Most programs can be undertaken at all only because of the possibility of correction in practice. The citizen who writes a letter of complaint and the commentator who appraises the working and results of a program are contributing to a process just as important as the franchise itself and closely related to the franchise. The pushing around that government workers in the field suffer at the hands of citizens with whom they work is a part of the process. The process influences the President and workers at every level. Its ultimate impact and effect on and through Congress and through elections are only the ultimate aspects of a pervading process.

What results from this process of organizational and popular coordination—and it is one way of defining the essence of good administration—is not an arbitrary product but an organized product, an institutional product, a representative product, a political product. It will be a product to which no very great number will much object, one for which no better alternative was clearly available, one that is subject to change and will be changed in the light of experience, in response to popular criticisms. Such should be the products of democratic government.