Principles for Public Management Practice: From Dichotomies to Interdependence

MARTHA S. FELDMAN* AND ANNE M. KHADEMIAN**[1]

In this essay we explore the relationship between management practices and a basic governance dilemma: how to manage flexibly and accountably. The challenge is both practical and theoretical. Managers must respond flexibly to the changing demands and expectations of the public and the ever-changing nature of public problems, yet they must do so in a manner that provides accountability to the public and political overseers. A dichotomous approach to the study of leadership as management action and the governance structures within which managers operate has inhibited the search for a public management theory that reconciles the dilemma. Emphasis upon managers as leaders typically focuses on the flexible actions managers might take to overcome structural "barriers," while emphasis upon governance structures typically focuses on the essential role of structure in ensuring accountability and restraining or motivating particular management efforts. The practicing manager, however, cannot deal with these aspects of the work separately. Managers must attend to demands for both flexible leadership action and structures that promise accountability. Anecdotal evidence provides illustrations of some of the ways that managers can integrate these demands. We suggest that these efforts point to an alternative theoretical framework that understands action and structure as mutually constitutive, creating a dynamic tension in which attention to one requires attention to the other.

INTRODUCTION

The world of public managers today is radically different from that of a few decades past (Nalbandian). On the one hand, managers face tremendous expectations for greater flexibility in the management of public programs. Communities are increasingly heterogeneous, economies and communications are more accessible and global, connections and partnerships between organizations, the public and private sectors, and policy arenas multiply, and members of the public are better able to scrutinize government performance and demand improved performance. Traditional governance structures built upon command and control

*Department of Political Science and Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan
**Robert A. Fox Leadership Program, University of Pennsylvania

organizations, centralized rule structures, and formulaic policy responses do not function well in this new environment, which demands flexibility. At the same time, however, these traditional governing structures have been put in place for good reason. They have long provided a form of accountability, legitimacy, and sense of direction for public organizations. While flexibility is becoming essential, the public is not willing to forsake accountability to achieve it. Confronted with antiquated systems of governance, managers must exercise leadership, but not in an "anything goes" manner. In short, managers face the challenge of developing an alternative form of accountability that allows for greater flexibility of action. Finding such an alternative is a modern management dilemma (Behn).

A PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL DILEMMA

The accountability-flexibility dilemma has its roots in the earliest American efforts to develop a field of public administration practice and scholarship. While there were important differences between reformers, several prominent ones emphasized both vigorous leadership and structural and procedural reforms as the key to better performing government. In 1887, for example, Princeton professor Woodrow Wilson argued that strong leadership visibly exercised would be accountable leadership: "There is no danger in power . . . [I]f it be centred in heads of the service and in heads of branches of the service, it is easily watched and brought to book" (Wilson, 76). Wilson and others viewed the flexible exercise of authority by leaders and top managers as essential to the effective operation of administrative systems and implementation of administrative procedures (Behn).

Wilson made his argument for vigorous administrative leadership in the context of his own parallel efforts and those of others to make the business of government more efficient and accountable in its conduct through structural and procedural reforms. From the design of city governments (Bruere; Schiesl) to the search for scientifically derived principles of administrative procedure (Goodnow; Gulick and Urwick), reformers looked to the role organizational structure and administrative procedure might play in the efficient and accountable execution of government. In other words, good government demanded vigorous and visible leadership as well as proper governing structures to insure that the public interest was pursued both creatively and accountably.

Rather than pursue the study of administration through both lenses simultaneously, however, the young field of public administration focused much of its attention on structural and procedural design of organizations and organizational systems as key to good management (Knott and Miller; Roberts 1994).[2] The study of leadership, where the adjectives "entrepreneurial," "innovative," "flexible," and "creative" referred to business leaders revered for their accomplishments in the marketplace,

became a more fundamental concern for business scholars and practitioners (Barnard). Across the twentieth century, politicians and scholars interested in reforming public administration looked toward the exercise of leadership in the private sphere (such as that of Peter Grace, head of the Grace Commission) to set the tone for government reform. Historians (e.g., McGraw) pointed to several public administrative leaders who broke the mold of conservative and compliance-oriented leadership —some a bit too exuberantly (see Lewis). However, with a few exceptions (e.g., Kaufman), the study of administrative leadership has remained somewhat disconnected from the study of administrative systems.

The current debate over the new public management also perpetuates a dichotomous approach between a focus on leadership or structure. Some approaches to this movement emphasize releasing and enhancing the capacity of managers to lead; others emphasize changing structures to shape or influence management actions. As Donald Kettl points out, the American version of new public management supports greater management flexibility. Structures such as rules, hierarchy, and the ties that bind managers limit flexibility and creativity (Gore). If managers in the public sector had the same flexibility as managers in the private, or if they perceived their work in terms such as the "creation of public value" (Moore) or the pursuit of continuous improvement (Drucker), the work of government would be vastly improved. In New Zealand and Great Britain, however, what is understood as the new public management emphasizes the proper construction of incentive structures to "make managers manage" as key to government performance (Kettl). Contracts specifying performance goals hold managers accountable for the bottom line and limit their engagement in "politics" or policy design (Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh). In other words, these contracts limit the vigorous leadership capacity of a manager.

Both approaches to reform have been criticized. The leader-based system is perceived to have a deficit of accountability (Moe; Terry). The rule-based systems have a deficit of flexibility, including the constraints of trying to separate policy and operation functions, and defining and working toward what can be measured as a bottom line (Mihm). The failure to conceptualize what is in fact a tension has had implications not only for the practice of public management, but also for the theoretical development of public management as a field of study.

In this essay we argue first that, in practice, public managers do not have the luxury of separating out expectations for flexible leadership from demands for strict accountability in the form of structures or guarantees that check and limit management action. They must grapple with both. We demonstrate that the choices they make *can* facilitate a productive tension between the two. We draw upon examples from our own research and other published work to illustrate some of the ways in which managers are trying to address both demands. We classify their efforts under two different management "principles," which we refer to

as inclusiveness and the primacy of process, and we demonstrate the ways in which these efforts can highlight the interdependence of management actions and governance structures. In addition to serving as illustrations of management efforts that engage the tension between accountability and flexibility, the examples we provide in this paper are examples that we admire because they are efforts to increase participation in the management of public policy. We fully realize that not all efforts to manage inclusively and with an emphasis on process will be perceived by all participants and observers as "positive," but we believe any effort toward these ends are steps toward more participatory management processes. The reader does not need to embrace this normative dimension of our illustrations in order to understand our argument about the interdependence between and the mutually constitutive nature of management actions and governance structures.

Second, we argue that these management efforts suggest a guide for public management theory and provide a framework for future research in which management action and governance structures are understood as interconnected or mutually constitutive. Here, structure is understood in both concrete terms, such as an organization or department, written rules, procedures and contracts, and less physical terms, such as norms, expectations, or conditions for legitimacy. Action is understood as the acts of individual agents acting within institutional contexts.

Social theorists have pointed out that though these actions and structures are separable conceptually, in practice action creates and recreates structure while structures enable and constrain action (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1979, 1984; Lave; Ortner 1984, 1989). In other words, action and structure are not just essential to the existence of each other; they are also mutually constitutive. Thus, structure is constituted by the actions of individuals, and action is enabled and constrained by the structures that result.

An example of this relationship is the relationship between speech and language (Giddens 1984). While speech and language can be separated analytically or conceptually, in practice they produce and reproduce one another. Language (structure) constrains and enables speech (action), but speech also contributes to and creates language. The actions of individuals change structures, but—as this example indicates—they are not independent of structures. One cannot simply start creating words or using them in ways that are radically different and still be understood by other people, which is necessary for speech. At the same time, speech does change language as people use it differently. Rules of grammar and meanings of words change as usage changes. The interaction between speech and language illustrates interactions that are characteristic in general of actions at the individual level and structures at the institutional level.

The practice of public managers necessarily involves the intersection of actions they take that create and recreate governance structures and the

ways in which governance structures enable and constrain those actions. By focusing on practice or the confluence of actions and structure, rather than on structures or leadership actions alone, we can begin to think about the coherence between structure and leadership. However, just as people speaking a language do not create all the structures that constrain and enable their speech, public managers do not create all the structures that constrain and enable their actions. The focus we propose here can also help us think about which structures and actions influence one another and how they do so. This focus could help to avoid the problem Kettl has identified in relation to new public management reforms that are inconsistent and unstable because they are ad hoc and lack coherence.

MANAGING FOR FLEXIBILITY, MANAGING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MANAGEMENT AS PRACTICE

It is traditional in the study of management to derive principles of management from the practices of managers (Fayol; Gulick and Urwick). Current scholars of public management are no exception to this tradition. In this section we suggest that many of the principles in the current literature attend primarily to one side of the governance dilemma of flexibility and accountability because they are primarily focused on either leadership or structure. Principles that attend explicitly to both aspects of the dilemma are not well represented in this literature. We first present a few examples of what we call principles of action (managing for flexibility) and principles of structure (managing for accountability). We then contrast these with two principles of practice that capture some of the ways in which managers we have interviewed or about whom we have read are dealing with the demand to manage both flexibly and accountably.

Principles of Action

A growing literature on leadership builds upon the ideas and findings of earlier scholars (Barnard; Selznick) to address the challenges faced by today's public managers (Bryson and Crosby; Carnevale; Heifetz; Luke; Moore). Much of this literature is devoted to the search for principles or rules that enable managers to achieve desired results. Three such principles can be identified in the current public management literature. One principle holds that managers, as leaders, should take actions to "create public value" (Moore). The premise of this principle is that value creation does not stop at the doors of City Hall or the legislature, but requires the creative and perhaps entrepreneurial efforts of a public manager to unearth public priorities and the means to meet those priorities. As in the private sector, creating something of value to the public serves as the primary guide for leadership actions. A second principle is that public managers manage the mission, prescribing a role for managers in the identification and development of a mission, as well as its maintenance

and tending (Barzelay; Senge). Finally, implicit in both the leadership principles to "create public value" and "manage the mission" is the principle of continuous improvement (Drucker). Value creation requires continuous attention to the ways in which a program is delivered, as well as to the value of the program content itself for members of the public. Similarly, the guiding principle of "managing the mission" implies the need to monitor the value of a mission for the public served, and to make necessary improvements to it.

We argue that these three basic principles, while hardly the universe of recommendations from this literature, represent principles of action. They tell managers what to manage (the mission), how to manage it (continuously trying to improve) and toward what ends to manage it (the creation of public value). While the institutional constraints that might limit or bind leadership efforts are acknowledged, the emphasis is on the actions that leaders can and should take. Indeed, the managers identified as stellar are those who manage to pursue a mission and create public value in spite of constraints such as organizational inertia, legislative opposition, and the enigma of personnel systems and union contracts (Moore).[3]

As a result these principles tell us more about how to achieve flexibility than how to achieve accountability. In what direction lies improvement or value? Whose standards do we use to assess it? What role should a manager's vision or set of ideas play in the determination of direction, and what standards should be used to judge the quality of the outcome and the accountability of the manager to the public for the outcome? The inevitability of mistakes means that other principles are important for ensuring accountability. How can a person tell if the effort to improve or to create value is taking place even when mistakes are made?

Principles of Structure

In direct response to such concerns, principles also flow from the new public management literature that emphasize the importance of structure for making managers manage according to the priorities of political principles and the public they represent. In his review of management reforms in four countries, Peter Aucoin (250) criticizes the action approach to public management that seeks to liberate management efforts from governance structures:

> Unfortunately, there is still reliance [in Canada] on the ill-conceived notion that management reform means increased managerial discretion and the empowerment of public servants. The assumption has been that, to achieve better results, public servants must be freed from controls, rules and compliance with procedures. To the extent that Canadian reformers have framed the agenda in terms of discretion and empowerment (even at times implying that "entrepreneurial" public servants should ignore controls and procedures to overcome bureaucracy), it is not surprising that ministers and Members of Parliament have been less than enthusiastic supporters of the new public management. And with good reason: such ideas are contrary to good government.

Instead, Aucoin and others advocate a series of structural principles, aimed more explicitly at the design of management systems than at the managers themselves. Perhaps most basic here is the principle of the separation of policy-making and advice from operations (Wilson). In New Zealand, for example, reformers have emphasized the need to separate the making of policy from its implementation as a crucial dimension for accountability (Boston, et al.).

The importance of the bottom line is another principle of structure often proposed as part of the new public management. The use of government contracts with the private and nonprofit sectors to conduct the work of government, as well as direct efforts to compete with the private sector, comprise ways to use the bottom line as a principle of structure to improve performance and reduce government costs. Performance-based pay and gain-sharing are two reward structures that reflect this principle. A third principle is specialization, in which organizations or ad hoc groups are charged with the accomplishment of specific, usually measurable tasks (National Performance Review). While this is a fundamental principle of the new public management, it also has deep roots in American public administration, with reformers such as Luther Gulick emphasizing differentiation of function as a key component of organizational efficiency. Responsibility for a narrowly defined task or program is given to an operational unit under the principle of specialization.

A "performance-based organization" captures all of these principles. As advocated by the National Performance Review (NPR), a performance-based organization (PBO) gives a single operational unit exclusive responsibility for a narrowly defined program area. The evaluation of performance and the provision of rewards, particularly for the director and other top executives, are dependent on the generation of specified outputs. These organizations are to have no policy-making ability and no influence on policy. The organizational model proposed by the NPR is patterned after similar reforms in Great Britain initiated by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (see Roberts 1997). The Student Financial Aid Office in the Department of Education, charged with modernizing the delivery of student financial aid, was authorized by the U.S. Congress in 1998 to operate as a PBO (Friel).

These three principles of structure—separation of policy from operations, the importance of the bottom line, and specialization—exemplify the emphasis upon structure as a key to accountability for management actions. They also exemplify what is missing from this perspective. While each of the three provide a means of keeping track of what people are doing and ensuring accountability, they do not pay as much attention to the ability to respond flexibly to changing demands. The separation of policy-making from administration can restrict the decision-making domain of public managers and their ability to take into consideration information that they gain through their interactions with frontline employees and the public. Similarly, the designation of narrow fields of

specialization can restrict public managers' ability to expand attention to issues that are interrelated and interdependent, thus keeping public managers and public employees inside the proverbial "box." The importance of the bottom line has more potential for flexibility if emphasis on achieving particular outcomes is accompanied with a liberalization of ways to achieve those outcomes, but determination of what will be an outcome and finding ways to assess those outcomes can, in fact, inhibit flexibility. As a 1997 GAO report focused on the British "Next Steps" initiative noted, "targets are sometimes set simply to reflect an improvement on the previous year's achievement rather than being based on an assessment of what might be possible, . . . [and] evaluation showed that performance measures frequently focus on what agencies *can measure*, rather than on what is most important in assessing performance (Mihm, Chapter Statement: 2, 3; emphasis added).

Principles of Practice

Our observations of public managers and various published accounts suggest that some managers have adopted aspects of these principles of action and principles of structure without also accepting the constraints that accompany them. In so doing, these managers have created new ways of managing and new ways of being accountable. In the following section, we present two principles that help to conceptualize these efforts: inclusion and the primacy of process. Like the principles of action and structure identified above, these two principles do not represent the realm of possible principles for integrating flexibility with accountability. However, we view them as conceptual and practical tools that can facilitate our understanding of flexibility and accountability and management efforts to respond to both. We examine these principles in the context of leadership action and structural arrangements that are not separate and competing influences on public management, but coequal parts of a system.

Inclusion

Public managers in many cities are including a broader base of individuals and points of view in the management process through direct participation, greater representation, and the consideration of alternative sources of information. Some managers might practice inclusion as an end in itself. A more inclusive management process might mean a more democratic management process, or one more closely aligned with expectations for public participation. However, in the cases we cite here, inclusion provides an opportunity for managers to see a broader picture that includes the interactions between the structures of governance and the actions of governance. This broader picture allows managers to accomplish public goals in a more flexible manner and to improve public outcomes, while still attending to the demands and concerns for accountable

use of public money and power. From this perspective, inclusion is a means to see the dynamic connections between the two.

In East St. Louis, a joint effort to rebuild and revitalize neighborhoods demonstrates the ways in which attention to inclusion can help managers see the actions they might take to alter structures that inhibit more flexible or innovative action. Faculty and students from the University of Illinois-Urbana and residents of the city have formed the East St. Louis Action Research Project, or ESLARP. In the early years of the project (1988–1990), participating faculty viewed their role as one of providing expertise through design solutions to improve water supply, develop parks, or encourage investment. Residents knew little if anything about ESLARP, as it had been authorized by the state legislature and implemented through the university. In 1990, Professor Kenneth Reardon accepted the responsibility for overseeing the project. He believed that he needed to transform the role of the university in working with the community and to practice greater inclusion. Including more voices from the city in the project revealed ways in which previous actions had perpetuated structures that impeded new ideas and new methods of approaching problems. Many of the structural impediments were found in the professional culture of participating faculty, who viewed their role as one of authority through expertise. These structures denied the residents access to the research agenda and the power to influence the process of change.

A more inclusive process has led to efforts to jointly create bases of information for the ESLARP project, which have not only strengthened commitment to the program but have led to a broader range of goals and plans for the community. For example, rather than faculty and students identifying problems to be addressed, residents across the various neighborhoods were given disposable cameras and asked to take "nine photographs showing the most valuable and unique qualities of their area; nine photographs revealing the biggest problems confronting their community; and nine photographs highlighting spaces, institutions, and facilities which, if developed, could become important community assets" (Reardon and Shields, 24). These camera exercises have since become the basis of an annual strategic planning process in the neighborhoods, and they are part of what participants call an empowerment planning process. The increasingly broad participation of residents in this process and the enhanced organizational capacity of community-based organizations prompted financial support from the city for a variety of neighborhood planning ideas, from the building of a farmers' market to the refurbishing of homes for elderly residents (Reardon).

These efforts to practice inclusion have also revealed additional structural barriers, such as differences in education and opportunities, which limit the ability of residents to participate in the project with frames of knowledge similar to those of students and faculty. This revelation, and the residents' demand for its redress, led to the creation of the Neighborhood College, providing college-level courses taught free of charge by

university faculty to residents and community leaders on topics ranging from race relations to economics (Reardon and Shields).

Figure 1 offers a diagram of inclusion as a management practice aimed at integrating concerns for flexibility and accountability. As in the case of ESLARP, there is potential for inclusion to increase over time. This is indicated on the right-hand side of the diagram. The practice of inclusive management draws direct attention to structural barriers that inhibit inclusion, which can result in actions to reduce these structural barriers. Actions taken to reduce these structural barriers create the potential for increased inclusion. Inclusion also acts to increase flexibility through the flow of ideas and knowledge that can come from broader participation in the management process. Broader participation through inclusion also directly impacts accountability by increasing the number of participants, perhaps those previously excluded, in the process of defining public problems, identifying solutions, and evaluating those efforts. Finally, attention to structural barriers can produce efforts to reduce those barriers, and hence to increase flexibility in the management process, which might in turn foster means to serve and include members of the public previously excluded either through new knowledge or direct participation.

These dynamics of inclusion are also illustrated in the Child Development-Community Policing (CD-CP) program in New Haven, Connecticut (Marans). This project unites police officers and child mental health workers in improving the ways in which both professions address the needs of children exposed to community violence. Teams of police officers and mental health professionals have regular forums for interaction through special seminars, training sessions, on-site calls, and regular joint case briefings at which particularly difficult cases are discussed. This joint approach has altered structures that professionals and the

FIGURE 1
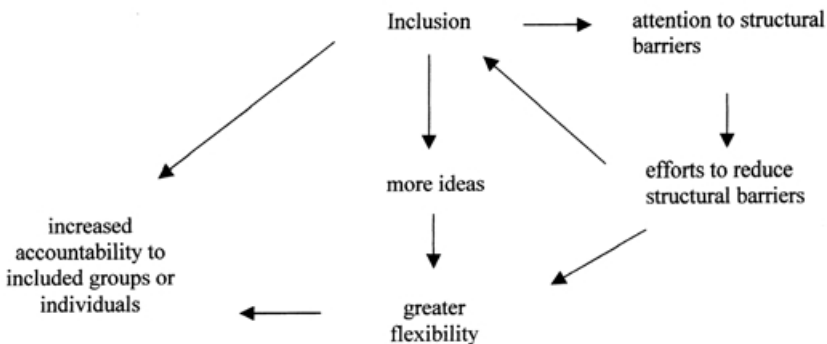
community utilize to deal with community violence, and has highlighted additional ways in which joint actions can further alter structures.

The effect of the project on police officers illustrates this interaction. When managers proposed the program, the officers' responses made it clear that, before the program could succeed, the structures defining police knowledge, backup support, and crime scene efforts would need to change. In other words, a more inclusive approach to community violence brought direct attention to structures that inhibited a more flexible approach to the problem. Once officers were gradually exposed to the joint effort, "their appreciation of the experience and meaning of chronic exposure to violence and the potential for traumatization grew" (Marans, 106). Officers began to see not only the consequences of their individual actions on police procedures (the ways in which they approached the children and families, the partnership with mental health workers on the scene, and efforts to protect the children from media and other sources of intrusion), but also the consequences of the ways in which they and the community responded to and dealt with violence. As part of a broader effort to build community policing in New Haven, officers reported that their encounters with children and families through the CD-CP program helped them to build relationships with the community that facilitated their more general efforts (Marans, 109). In other words, traditional police procedures that provided a form of accountability are being augmented by direct contact with the community as a form of accountability and an emphasis on building strong relationships that also have consequences for the community's capacity to address violence.

Both ESLARP and the CD-CP program illustrate the ways in which inclusiveness as a management principle can draw attention simultaneously to issues of flexibility and to issues of accountability. In both cases, inclusion makes visible some of the structural impediments to participation, and altering these structural impediments increases the ability to include. Moreover, both cases illustrate how broadening participation expands the ideas available for dealing with problems and increases the accountability to the newly included groups or individuals.

We sound a note of caution at this juncture. The cases we have presented to illustrate the principle of inclusion have a generally positive quality in terms of both the process and the outcome. We wish to point out that inclusiveness can have costs as well. For instance, inclusiveness can make a process take a longer time. Inclusiveness can also produce negative outcomes. The valuation of outcomes depends on the nature of the new ideas and the values that underlie the way they are used by both old and new participants in the system. If the people who are included espouse values with which one disagrees, the outcome of the inclusion could well be negative from one's own standpoint. While the outcomes of these examples are interesting, it is not our point to take a position on their value. Rather, we use these examples to illustrate the *potential* for

managers to engage the relationship between action and structure through greater participation.

Primacy of Process

The principle that we call the primacy of process suggests that, while problem-solving may be the ultimate goal, the way to get there is to focus on the process of arriving at the solution, rather than on the solution itself. The following quote from a public manager in Charlotte, North Carolina, expresses the rationale behind this emphasis:

> Right, because as long as we can talk to each other, we can solve problems with one another. And when we get to a point where we can't communicate, that you cannot even approach me to talk about some of the issues, then we can never get beyond wherever that was. I always tell folks in my department, *we will have many projects together but we're not going to have many opportunities at a relationship* (Watkins, emphasis added).

This quote makes clear that the process is a specific kind of process, one that builds the capacity for people with different perspectives to work together. In this sense, this principle overlaps with the principle of inclusiveness. "Primacy" refers to the notion that the ability to work together is fundamental and is more important than the outcome in most specific situations.

Primacy of process draws attention to the ways in which actions are constrained and enabled by structure. The importance of process for customer service has led many agencies to create centers that allow for "one-stop shopping." Veterans, for instance, can now turn to a single caseworker in the Veterans Administration (VA) for benefit questions and problems, rather than waiting months to a year for individuals throughout the VA to deal with their concerns on a piecemeal basis. Communities are also creating centers that provide police, fire, and a variety of other social services under one roof. Development centers have also been created that allow developers to have access in one place to all the departments that need to approve their plans. Such relocation of services often creates teams of people who are geographically and substantively, rather than hierarchically, related. Such restructuring can have profound effects on the actions of the people in the team. The following excerpts from an interview with a midlevel manager in Grand Rapids, Michigan, provide some examples of new structures that have been created as a result of the decision to make the process primary:

> [V]arious people are now coming up with ways of improving that service which I think is an interesting result. For example, our chief building inspector occupies a seat out front, J__ J____. And on his own he came up with a pretty simple method of keeping track of construction drawings and sign-offs and he circulates a list of sign-offs that haven't been made one week after this thing has come in. And so people are made aware without a lot of pressure that if they get right on it we can get these plans turned around for review purposes within a week.

> Where before sometimes it took six weeks. You had all the back and forth and it gets buried on somebody's desk . . .
>
> [O]ne of the other innovations is that E__, my counterpart in the Building Group, had laid out a plan room so now instead of a plan going from desk to desk the plans stay in one place. People come to the room and that's different than the way we used to operate. He's also got a composite letter, which summarizes all of the review comments so that the developer can receive them all at a single time and he knows where he stands with respect to each trade specialty. That's kind of happened as a result I think of seeing this place come together and thinking through what the opportunities are for making it work even better (Schilling).

The interviewee believed these changes in action took place because the new process allowed the employees to see new ways of taking action, or to work around and alter structures that inhibited such action in the past. As this same interviewee pointed out, this is distinct from an empowered employee suggesting actions about which they had long been thinking. The emphasis on process was required to make the structural dynamics visible and the potential actions possible. As he said of the first example, "he can see new ways to move the process along that maybe he didn't see before" (Schilling).

Primacy of process also draws attention to the ways in which actions influence structure. Such effects are illustrated by the concerns expressed in a meeting one of the authors observed in Charlotte, North Carolina, about how to develop a transit system. The following is an excerpt from one author's field notes (Feldman 1998):

> The transportation staff handed out a letter with an agenda of next steps and their boss started to talk about the need for a survey. At this point, the Director of Planning, the Director of Communication and the Deputy City Manager all started to say that *more process* was needed before any of these next steps could be taken. There were various concerns. One was that the transportation staff was looking to come up with solutions, which would then be presented to the townships. This would create political opposition. Another concern was that the solutions would be narrow and not consider land use and not think about the big picture. A third concern was that elements of plans—some already under way and some that would come out of this process—would not be linked and would create the appearance that they do not know what they are doing.

As the concerns of the managers imply, attending to *how* the work is being done is attending to the *effect* the process and the actions taken within that process are having on various structures. In the above example, for instance, some of the reasons for attending to process included concern about the potential for actions taken to cause friction between the structures of different political entities and to highlight the dominance of Charlotte over the smaller surrounding towns. While the other towns might be happy to have Charlotte take the lead and provide many of the resources, actions that appear to take away their ability to influence decisions could create political backlash and destroy the towns' ability to work together. Ultimately, the structures that enable cooperation could be threatened.

These structures affect accountability. Structures that enable coopera-
tion also increase expectations that activities will be coordinated and
interests will be taken into account. When Charlotte makes it clear that
the process matters, they send a message that they expect to include the
interests and needs of the surrounding communities in the development
of the transit plan. They place themselves in a position of being account-
able to these communities because they believe it will create policies that
work better for the whole area and that are ultimately more likely to be
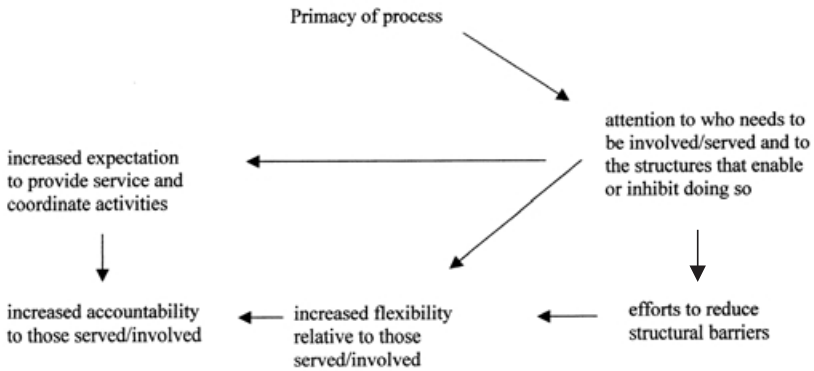implemented and implemented well.

This attention to how actions affect structures also enables managers to
work more flexibly when they are working across organizational or polit-
ical boundaries. Flexibility is ultimately required to find a balance
between potentially conflicting missions and interests reflected (in part)
in structures, as can be seen in the following quote:

> [E]mployees clearly [need to] know that we are open to doing something differ-
> ent. If a team is forcing me to do something in conflict with what I think my
> department mission is, then it is incumbent upon me to communicate that up so
> we can have a conversation about it and maybe go to a higher level of under-
> standing. I have been on teams before where I've had flexibility, but others
> didn't for whatever reason, because of their culture or whatever, and we imme-
> diately run into [a] blank wall and you start playing games with each other and
> you can't do business because you've got someone who refuses to move the
> sidewalk to put in a planting strip . . . well, how do we balance that in terms of
> the community? . . . I guess what I'm saying is that there are no easy answers if
> the dynamic is going on. I think part of the answer is, people can't always get
> caught up in the issues without stepping back and trying to help figure out
> what's going on. . . . [T]he *what* is to make the community better. If they say
> "St__, you need to stop spending money on this and can you spend money
> somewhere over there." And then my boss has to be flexible enough [that I can]
> say, "hey P__, according to my business plan, I'm going to do X amount of busi-
> ness, but because this makes some sense I need to be, maybe my business plan
> needs to be measured in a different way because it makes sense to do that"
> (Watkins).

Primacy of process asks managers to draw their own focus and those
of participants in the management process to the question of who needs
to be involved or served by public efforts and to the structures that enable
or inhibit those efforts. This focus, in turn, can have three consequences
(illustrated in Figure 2). First, as in the case of inclusion, it can lead to
efforts to reduce those structural barriers and thereby increase flexibility.
Second, attention to who needs to be involved or served can lead to
increased flexibility in serving the identified groups or individuals.
Third, attention to process can increase public expectations for coordi-
nated activities and improved service.

Focus on the primacy of process does not make the tension between
accountability and flexibility disappear. Instead, it raises the two to a
level of visibility that provides opportunities for explicit discussion.
When the effect of the process is as or more important than the particular
outcome, the need to maintain structures of accountability can be an

FIGURE 2

Primacy of process

attention to who needs to
be involved/served and to
the structures that enable
or inhibit doing so

increased expectation
to provide service and
coordinate activities

increased accountability
to those served/involved

increased flexibility
relative to those
served/involved

efforts to reduce
structural barriers

explicit consideration. If we take this action, will it injure the legitimacy of all or part of the organization? Is it worth the risk? Thus, flexibility and accountability become parts of a system in tension with one another, rather than being contradictory systems. The flexibility supported by the emphasis on process allows people to account for the effects their decisions have on structures, and even to accommodate the inevitable unintended consequences of these decisions.

QUESTIONS AND CRITIQUES

There are two ways in which our argument may conflict with the reader's experience of public management. First, simply showing that accountability and flexibility *can be* mutually constitutive does not mean they will *always be* mutually constitutive. An illustration is useful. A colleague of ours who administers a large research program has objected that accountability and flexibility really are in conflict.[4] He related his difficulty in flexibly responding to the needs of foreign scholars whom he wished to bring to work in the program because of the immigration service's demands for accountability. We acknowledge his and other people's frustrations with systems that are designed to control management processes for purposes of accountability. Though he is a manager within a university, he must also work within the constraints of other management systems such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In this example, his need for flexibility is hampered by the INS management system's emphasis on accountability. For accountability and flexibility to be mutually constitutive in this case, management in the INS would have to take a different perspective.

The examples in this paper represent this alternative perspective. Managers have choices about how they will approach accountability and flexibility, some of which will facilitate a mutually constitutive relationship

between accountability and flexibility. Elsewhere we have argued that two common models of public management accentuate the exercise of central control or accountability (Feldman and Khademian). One model, Managing for Process, emphasizes centralized control over management processes, or *ex ante* control; the second model, Managing for Results, emphasizes centralized control over results, or *ex post* control (Thompson). A third model, Managing for Inclusion (Feldman and Khademian), is more consistent with the principles of practice proposed in this paper. It advocates decentralized control over processes and results but centralized responsibility for implementing participation. In this model, management exerts control over how participation in the management process is implemented through the authority to train, reward, and ask people to account for their behaviors, but it allows them a great deal of discretion over specific processes and results. This model makes clear that people have control over many of their own decisions, rather than simply implementing a system over which they have no influence.

While we recognize that public managers live in a system of legislative, judicial, and administrative layers, the examples given in this paper illustrate that they also have many opportunities to make decisions about the way programs are managed. When these are the decisions of specific people with names and faces, they can be questioned, and the people making the decisions can be asked to account for them and perhaps be convinced to change their decisions. Key to this model is the emphasis on individual responsibility for how and why decisions are reached and how managers use their authority to provide more opportunities for participation in decision-making.

If managers and the systems within which they manage are geared toward the exercise of centralized control over process or results, flexibility and accountability will not be mutually constitutive. The dynamic tension between these two things requires very particular choices by management as to how participation in the management process will be implemented. To return for a moment to the example provided above, an immigration service with such a management approach might be able to provide the flexibility our colleague would like without losing its accountability. For example, the people in the INS with whom our colleague deals would have the discretion to make decisions about visiting scholars. If they could see that he would provide accountability, or work to develop a means to demonstrate accountability, they could then provide more flexibility in the timing and duration of scholarly visits.

This brings us to the second way in which the examples in this paper may conflict with the reader's experience. Inclusiveness or primacy of process or any other principle of management can be implemented in various ways. As noted earlier, the examples used in this paper have a generally positive quality. We chose the examples to illustrate the potential for a mutually constitutive relationship between flexibility and accountability. We also chose examples that represent choices we admire, though we

know that there may be aspects of them that are troubling to observers and even to participants. Specifically, moving beyond bureaucratic control to include aspects of the public in management decision-making always creates the possibility of exclusion. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, accountability increases *to the included groups*, not to everyone or to some general public. For instance, development centers could increase flexibility and accountability to the demands of developers while excluding the demands of other affected groups.[5] Related to the problem of exclusion is the problem of abuse. As we discuss in some detail elsewhere (Feldman and Khademian), management that emphasizes flexibility and individual responsibility can also produce abuse: for example, the INS employee who has the ability to extend discretion over foreign visiting scholars also has the ability to abuse that discretion.

What is important about this form of management with respect to both exclusion and abuse is not that the values are better, but that they are more public because of the increased level of participation. The inclusion of developers can serve as a signal of the value placed on participation, and it often makes the process more public, if only slightly. The move away from strict bureaucratic control to the public inclusion of even one group draws public attention to the value of participation and to the exclusion of other groups. If management claims that developers are being included because either "inclusiveness" or "process" is a primary value, then the exclusion of other groups is evidence of hypocrisy. A similar dynamic occurs for abuse. While the possibility for abuse may increase, practitioners of this form of management think that abuse is no more likely than in other systems of management. Moreover, because there are more people invested in the integrity of the system and because the values of the system are more visible, abuse may be easier to discover and deal with. In short, when one's values are visible, others can expect one to live up to those values. Hypocrisy can be a symptom of a system that is in the process of change and is open to change, rather than a symptom of a fundamentally malign system (Brunsson; March and Olsen). Or, as March (262) has said, "We can treat *hypocrisy as a transition*" (emphasis in the original). Managers can be encouraged to live up to the values they espouse.

DISCUSSION

Our primary goal in this paper has been to suggest an alternative analytic approach to the study of public management based upon the ways in which some managers are grappling with the joint demands for flexible leadership and systems of accountability. The dichotomy implicit in the question of whether management or the governance structures within which managers operate matters more has limited our understanding of the management task by theoretically separating action from structure and flexibility from accountability. A growing literature calls upon public

management scholars to invest efforts in identifying the interaction between management actions and the context or structures within which they take those actions (Fountain; Khademian; Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill; Weiss). In this paper we propose a basic premise: that action and structure, as well as flexibility and accountability, *cannot be separated in practice*. This approach suggests two primary points of emphasis or attention for the study of public management.

First, the integrated approach challenges us to think differently about the relation of theory to practice. Specifically, it suggests that, in the development of theory, we need to pay more attention to the ways in which public management—or any other activity—is actually practiced. This differs from best practices research and from hypothesis-testing research. The effort is neither to make claims about the "best" way to manage nor to use empirically based research to prove theory. Instead, the rationale for this research is to draw out the implicit theories in the practice. Thus, Lave's research on cognition uses her knowledge of cognitive theories to inform her observations of people doing mathematics in circumstances outside of the classroom. She then draws out the implicit theories the people use to make their calculations. Finally, she uses her understanding of these implicit theories to understand more about the relationship between context and action. Thus, practice is not conceived of as being based on theory: theory is based on practice, but ultimately theory and practice are mutually constitutive and inseparable. The work of Feldman (1989), Hutchins, Suchman, Orr, and others follows a similar logic.

A second point of emphasis is the need to utilize nonlinear approaches in our examinations of public management. The relationship between practice and theory discussed above suggests the need to understand nonlinear interactions in which actions impact structure and vice versa to create systems. Rather than conceptualize our examinations of public management in terms of the incentives for action created by structure, for example, or the consequences of particular actions for the structural context, we need to think of the mutually constitutive relationship between the two that forms a dynamic system.

Efforts to view the work of public managers in a more dynamic and nonlinear manner are underway. While some are taking an explicit practice approach in trying to explain public policy outcomes such as welfare programs (e.g., Sandfort), others are maintaining more traditional research parameters grounded in principal agent theory while attempting to model the nonlinear dimensions of public management (e.g., O'Toole and Meier). Still others are engaged in efforts to see the dynamics between actions and structure by examining the connections between decisions to contract with the private and nonprofit sectors, the structures that evolve, and the implications for service delivery effectiveness (e.g., Provan and Milward). Research has also been undertaken to examine the implications for public expectations of change in public policy structures

and the capacity to participate in the policy process (Ingram and Smith). These efforts build upon the premise that public management takes place in a nonlinear system. We would encourage similar efforts to better understand the ways in which practice evolves from the interaction of management efforts and structural context.

CONCLUSION

Public managers need to utilize public resources in a flexible manner. The public demands that the public managers address problems that are increasingly understood in complex and interconnected ways, and financial constraints limit the amount of resources upon which any given division or organization can draw to address these problems. At the same time, the public demands accountability for the use of public money and power. Flexible management can cut across structures or procedures that have traditionally provided a form of legitimacy for the expenditure of funds or exercise of government authority. These structures run the gamut from professional procedures or routines for the conduct of police work to procedures for soliciting public comments to training processes to approaches to implementation or evaluation. Tampering with established structures can shatter public acceptance of or levels of comfort with the exercise of government authority. One possible way to understand this relationship between flexibility and accountability is as a trade-off: maximize one, and minimize or diminish the other.

Reformers within the new public management emphasize the bottom line, or the performance, of an agency as a form of accountability that can also accommodate flexibility. Yet, as we have discussed in connection with the principles of action and structure, the performance of a government agency remains a very difficult outcome to discern. Hence, *how* something is accomplished—the process by which it is accomplished —remains a critical dimension of accountability. We have argued that a possible solution rests with the principles of practice managers use to meet the joint demands for flexibility and accountability. Our observations and discussion of public management efforts suggest that some public managers do understand the mutually constitutive relationship between action and structure as it affects their daily efforts. The capacity to perceive this relationship offers managers a means to keep flexibility and accountability in a dynamic tension. We suggest that public management scholars can elevate this understanding from an implicit "theory in use" to an explicit "espoused theory" (Schon, 305). This approach could be a productive one for public management scholarship and, ultimately, for its practice.

Efforts to use the principles we discuss—inclusiveness and primacy of process—are taking place amid changing conditions and demands in the political and social environment. We do not, however, want to give the impression that there is anything automatic about adopting these

principles. Indeed, moving toward greater inclusiveness and emphasis on the importance of process involves considerable will on the part of political actors. Our observations suggest that such will is rewarded, but it should also be recognized.

Notes

1. Because this paper is an equal collaboration, names are in alphabetical order.
2. Alasdair Roberts (1994) suggests that one of the reasons the field of public administration focused so intently upon systems of administration as a key to neutrality was because of the influence exerted by the Rockefeller Foundations as a source of funding. Concerned about perceptions of "meddling" in political questions through grant-giving, the Foundations vigorously supported the idea of separating politics from administration, and the role that properly designed systems might play in that effort.
3. See especially Mark Moore's (60–62) discussion of "Jerome Miller and the Department of Youth Services."
4. We are grateful to Jack Knott for this illustration.
5. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this illustration.

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