



Why Study PA Theory?

- ◆ “There’s nothing so useful as a good theory.”

-- good theory based on reliable and replicable knowledge is very practical!

- ◆ Usefulness of any theory depends on its capacity to *describe*, to *explain*, and to *predict*.



Meanings of Theory

- ◆ Generally, theory is an orientation, framework, technique or approach. More formally, it can have three meanings:
 - A rigorous testing of predictive theorems or hypotheses using observable and comparable data.
 - Ordering of factual material (history, events, cases, stories, measures of opinion, observation) so as to present evidence through definitions, concepts, and metaphors that improve understanding.
 - Normative, or theories of what ought to be.



Ultimate Test of Theory in PA

How useful is it...
the “so what?” question!

Barth Favorites



- ◆ There is no single dominant theory...but several strong and important theories and theorists...a condition befitting a field as applied and interdisciplinary as PA. Different theories will be more or less useful depending on context, e.g....
- ◆ Use of metaphor to understand organizations
- ◆ Use of sociological paradigms to understand different ways of making sense of the world



Useful Theories: Church Case

◆ Crisis Management Theory

-- tell the truth, own the problem, apologize, and provide solutions

◆ Goal Displacement

-- remind yourself and others...why are we here?

◆ Bureaucracy as the Divider

-- truly know the lives of those you serve



Church Case (cont'd)

◆ Organizational Culture

- are norms & values consistent with your mission?
- which people and behaviors get rewarded?

Fostering Accountability & Trust

- vertical, horizontal & external

◆ Building Community

- stewardship, ethic of caring

Politics/Administration Dichotomy



- ◆ Whether serving under a political appointee (federal & state), city council or county commission (local) or board of directors (nonprofit), you will get orders you think are misguided.
- ◆ You will also have discretion in your work.
- ◆ Consider neutral competence, speaking truth to power, subordinate autonomy



Bureaucratic Politics

- ◆ As a public administrator you will have power...will you use it to serve...
- ◆ Your superior?
- ◆ Your specific workload?
- ◆ Your colleagues?
- ◆ Your clients?
- ◆ The rules?
- ◆ Yourself?



Institutional Theory

- ◆ Are you part of an organization or an institution?
- ◆ What is the difference and why does it matter?
- ◆ How does one infuse an organization with values and public legitimacy?
- ◆ Are there viable alternatives to hierarchy?



Management Theory

- ◆ Leading (vision) vs. Managing (POSDCORB)
- ◆ Theory X vs. Theory Y is real!
- ◆ Authentic Communication (getting to what people really want...from conflict mgmt.)
- ◆ Leading a coalition or alliance requires different skills from leading a hierarchy

Postmodern Theory

- ◆ Reality is socially constructed.
- ◆ The ideals of truth, rationality, certainty, and coherence are over..."all that remains is to play with the pieces."
- ◆ Implications for PA: to be effective one must come to terms with the reality and truths of others...not just yours or the dominant group...applicable to "wicked problems."



Decision Theory



- ◆ We intend to act rationally, but due to numerous realities we practice bounded rationality, incrementalism, and often just “muddle through”.
- ◆ Logic of Appropriateness: we cope with dynamic environments or changing contexts.
- ◆ Garbage Can Theory: timing is everything...must be ready to act!

Rational Choice Theory



- ◆ The rational, self-maximizing bureaucrat (or aspects of him/her) is a reality...
- ◆ Must understand who your key stakeholders are and what's in it for each of them!!!