

INDICATORS OF BUREAUCRATIC PERFORMANCE IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES: USES AND LIMITATIONS

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Scholars and practitioners have long devoted attention to the problem of bureaucratic productivity and performance. Contributions have come from the most varied sources, and normative prescriptions based on these studies can now be counted by volumes. A great deal of effort and resources have been spent in identifying those variables accounting for low levels of administrative capacity for development in the so-called "less developed countries." A large number of international organizations, universities, governmental agencies, and private foundations have sponsored research projects, advisory missions, meetings of experts, and other activities of this sort, all aimed at providing expertise and theoretical support for "building" such capacity, the assumption being that, if certain obstacles are removed, the path to development will be opened to the advance of the triumphant forces of rational-productive administration. A symbiotic relationship between scholars and practitioners has been thus established, with the former getting glimpses of "reality" from technocratic experience and the latter gaining access to theoretical rationales for actual events through the insights stemming from the world of academia.

In spite of this frantic activity, however, most problems concerning the effectiveness or efficiency of public bureaucracies in the Third World remain unsolved and/or are becoming even more acute. International organizations continue inaugurating "developmental decades" or building up technocratic "know-how;" governments design and discard strategies of administrative reform; and private foundations and research institutions keep on furnishing financial assistance to scholars eager to unveil the intricacies of bureaucratic "irrationality." It would appear, as Siffin put it, that "somewhat as the gap between the 'developed' nations and the bottom tiers of the 'undeveloped' nations seems to grow relentlessly, so grows the gap between the full range of our comprehension of the nature of development and our capability to 'do it'."¹ What explains this gap between knowledge and action, that is, between what is "known" in the field of administrative change, and what is actually done?

Several answers can be readily advanced. First, those who "know" are not usually those who "act." Second, those who wish to "act" do not always have access to those who "know." Third, the drive for action seldom awaits for the expert advice of the "man of knowledge."² Fourth, knowledge by itself is insufficient to elicit action. Finally, inaction —a negative form of action— may be preferred to action, even though

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¹ William J. Siffin, "Introduction", in John D. Montgomery and W. J. Siffin, *Approaches to Development* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 1966), p. 4.

² Albert O. Hirschman has appropriately referred to this phenomenon as the decision-making style where motivation outruns understanding, see *Journeys Toward Progress* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963).

available knowledge may suggest "active" choices. However, it may also be assumed that available knowledge is inadequate for assessing the performance of public bureaucracies and the prospects of reform. Therefore, if change is a prerequisite of productivity, action a prerequisite of change, and knowledge a prerequisite of sound action, the question arises as to what kind of knowledge, if any, is necessary to initiate the sequence and what factors — other than plain ignorance — preclude change-oriented action from taking place.

The present paper addresses itself to this general question, by examining some of the theoretical and practical difficulties involved in assessing the activities and output of public bureaucracies and discussing the use and limitations of performance indicators. However, I must warn the reader that these are only preliminary thoughts which have grown out of research presently being conducted in Uruguay and Argentina.

A few assumptions and premises should be clarified at the outset. Public bureaucracies will be conceptualized as systems of production which combine resources and process demands, turning out a wide variety of results or products. However, since bureaucracies may assume different roles *vis-a-vis* the state and society, the nature and volume of the products resulting from their activity will depend, among other things, upon the relative predominance of one role over the others and their degree of mutual compatibility or conflict. This observation seems to be particularly valid in countries of the Third World, where the state administrative apparatus has significant political and social functions which often contradict its more conventional role of producer of goods and supplier of services to the public. I will contend that theoretical work on public bureaucracy has practically ignored these issues. Consequently, the utility of currently available conceptual tools is primarily limited to an appraisal of only the most conventional aspects of the state administrative apparatus. From this perspective, the debate begun by the so-called "New Public Administration" movement, especially its concern with the conflicting roles and the multifarious purposes of public organizations, constitutes a most revealing testimony to the weak theoretical foundations supporting most efforts to evaluate the state bureaucracy.³

If the preceding observations are accepted, it follows that indicators of performance must be critically revised in the light of an appropriate theory of the activity and social functions of public bureaucratic systems. Taken in isolation, indicators will fail to provide clear evidence about the nature of performance. Unless the constellation of variables associated with the output of bureaucracy is considered, assessment may result in a mere catalogue of pitfalls and deficiencies, the causes of which are inferred on a random and purely speculative basis. The problem is compounded by the fact that the nature and degree of determination of our variables will differ from one context or historical juncture to another. Hence, indicators will become meaningful only when linked to a broader conceptual interpretation of bureaucratic productivity and performance.

With these considerations in mind, let us first discuss some of the problems of measurement involved in the assessment of bureaucratic systems.

³ Several contributions to this movement have been gathered in Frank Marini, (ed.), *Toward a New Public Administration: The Monnowbrook Perspective* (California: Chandler Publishing, 1971).

1. On Measures and Comparisons

From time immemorial man has experienced the urge to measure and compare. The problem has always consisted in matching two elements (an object to be measured and a unit to compare with) and obtaining a result (a number, a value judgment, a decision premise). On the basis of experience, opinion, common sense, aspirations, expectations, needs or simple guesswork, man has developed standards of comparison, that is to say, yardsticks that serve to determine how certain results or observations compare with an accepted unit. Hence, he has acquired the possibility of judging whether or not observations are as they should be and of measuring relative capacity, quantity, content, extent, value, quality, and so forth.

In numerous walks of life, man has been able to express symbolically his standards of preference or his capacity to appreciate and size up physical phenomena. Thus, the 36-24-36 standard belongs in beauty contests, the 65 m.p.h. standard applies to speeding, and the 32° F standard serves the purpose of measuring temperature. Similarly, if we learn that an earthquake in some remote region of the world registered a 79 point in the Richter scale, we will immediately realize that a tragedy may have occurred.

These examples have two elements in common: (1) a perfectly defined phenomenon, the manifestations and range of variation of which are known or predictable; and (2) a generally accepted standard of comparison that reasonably contemplates all possible, or at least all relevant manifestations, and reproduces by means of a simplified symbology, a discrete set of intervals that correspond to different empirical situations.

In most cases, setting up standards involves some kind of value judgment and some degree of discretion. Indeed, the examples provided indicate certain preferences (e.g. with regard to beauty, safety, etc.) that may change according to time or place, and involve a certain degree of arbitrariness (e.g. several scales can be used for measuring temperature or intensity of earthquakes). Frequently, the status or performance of the unit being assessed is used as the standard of comparison. For instance, we may compare GNP at two points in time and find out that there has been no growth or growth below an accepted target (e.g. 5 per cent). This will be an indicator of stagnation or a slow growth rate which generally carries negative connotations. If, on the contrary, we compare the price levels at two successive years and it turns out that no change has taken place, it will mean that the economy suffers no inflationary pressures; this is generally evaluated positively.

The last two examples refer to phenomena —economic growth and inflation— that can be expressed in quantitative terms for they reflect monetary variations over time of the status or performance of perfectly defined systems—namely, the price and production systems. We may even disaggregate our data by sectors and consider output of the rural sector or the price behavior of foodstuffs. There is always a common unit of reference —money prices— which makes our comparison homogeneous and consistent.

On the other hand, when we refer to complex systems serving a wide array of goals and turning out different kinds of output that have no accepted "exchange rate," standards and indicators are much more difficult to fix. The assessment of bureaucratic performance is a clear case in point. The variety of goals, output and organizational units involved gives way to different perspectives, which vary

depending on the assessor's frame of reference. Thus, as was observed in a conference held a few years ago, the management auditor measures economy and efficiency; the program evaluator concentrates on measuring effectiveness in achieving goals and program objectives; the behaviouralist is concerned with the achievement of individuals' satisfaction; the political scientist examines adaptability, survival, growth and democratization; and the bureaucratologist investigates "diseases" and factors detracting from cooperation.⁴ As a way of reconciling these various approaches, the conference proposed that all different views and elements discussed should be combined into an integrated mathematical model. I doubt whether this exercise was ever attempted, but as a solution to the problem of bureaucratic assessment it sounds sufficiently naïve and sterile so as to deserve a quiet funeral.

More recently, another interdisciplinary group met at Alcalá de Henares, in Spain, with a similar hope of arriving at some conclusions on the prospects of formulating concrete measures of administrative capacity for development.⁵ At this conference, despite the fact that several indicators were identified and classified, no attempt was made—as Dr. Wu pointedly observes—"to integrate all these indicators into one single measurement of administrative capability or to show how to select indicators for the practical work of appraisal of a particular organization or a particular system."⁶

Indeed, the conclusions of the meeting" sound highly sensible and realistic. Dr. Wu himself acknowledges in his paper that "the choice of indicator(s) depends, first of all, on the specific individual situations, especially on the purposes of the appraisal,"⁷ a contention with which one cannot but agree. Certainly, indicators of bureaucratic performance make sense only insofar as the purposes sought in resorting to measurement or assessment are clear-cut.

Typically, complex systems such as public bureaucracies are subject to a global evaluation in the wake of large scale administrative reform. In these cases, normative issues are inevitably involved for the goals that the bureaucracy pursues and the extent to which social demands and expectations are met must fall within the area of competence of the assessor. Thus, standards of desirability must be established which, given the multiplicity and possible incongruence among goals, cannot be located along a unidimensional utility scale. The degree of goal incongruence may be quite high in view of the conflict of roles typical of the activity of public bureaucracies. Assessment must therefore rely—in Thompson's expression—on "social tests," that is, on criteria in which the factors of appraisal are eminently subjective, not amenable to "measurement" in any conventional sense and sharing, as a common attribute and condition, the fulfilment of certain expectations on the part of the assessor.⁸

As relativity crystallized normative standards are not available and knowledge about cause-effect relationships producing different out-comes is deficient, assessment often rests more on subjective and emotional criteria than on scientific or rational ones. Indeed, the evaluation of aggregate and complex systems such as public bureaucracies usually admit as basic premises certain

⁴ *The Possibilities and Potentialities of Measuring the Health of Governmental Organizations*, University of Connecticut, Second Annual Conference on the Role of Management Analysis in Government (Storrs, Conn.: 1965), quoted in Gerald Caiden, *Administrative Reform* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 28.

⁵ The report of this conference is excerpted below.

⁶ See paper by Chi-Yuen Wu, pp. 303-304 above.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 311.

⁸ See James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 1967)

socially shared values and beliefs that serve as surrogate standards of assessment. The society as a whole becomes the "reference group" of the assessor. Of course, there are strong reasons explaining this social awareness with regard to bureaucratic performance. As the area of state activity has grown to the point of practically embracing every vital facet of the individual's life and every aspect of social interaction, the bureaucracy has gained greater visibility and its activity has become more vulnerable to popular commentary and critique. Along with this process, a high degree of consensus on bureaucratic unproductivity has developed, resulting from a slow extrapolation of individual experience to the level of socially accepted truth. This consensus is the reflection of unfulfilled personal needs, of recurrent frustration, of judgments formed in daily exchanges with bureaucratic organizations.

In most Third World countries —and in many of those belonging to the other two worlds as well— it is widely believed that "the cost of bureaucracy is excessive" or that "public services are rendered in a highly ineffective way." Few would dare to question the validity of these two statements, being so deeply rooted and pervasive at the popular level. Thus, bureaucracies are considered unproductive for they hardly achieve their goals despite the "excessive" volume of resources expended.⁹ Put to the practical work of assessment, confirmation is usually substantiated through endless inventories of shortcomings and pitfalls requiring remedial action.

Even at this inter-subjective level it is possible to identify three different elements. First, there are some desirable states or *targets* which are at odds with actual performance. Second, there are some *standards* of comparison based either on social expectations, past experience or performance in other systems. Finally, there are some implicit *indicators* of poor performance which derive from comparing targets and standards with actual results. However, the bases upon which these targets, standards and indicators of bureaucratic performance rest offer weak support for evaluation or guidance of policy decisions. Hence, beyond myths and commonplaces, several questions can be raised that stand out as concerns which no *longer* admit hasty judgments or irreverent opinions. How much is "excessive"? How bad is "deficient"? What are the standards of comparison? Are there different standards applying to diverse social contexts or historical situations?

2. On Choosing Indicators

As a matter of fact, the translation of socially shared beliefs into scientifically accepted truths is no easy task. The first question that needs to be settled is how should productivity be conceptualized when it is applied to assessing the performance of the state administration. By productivity of public bureaucracy is generally meant both the capacity demonstrated by the state apparatus in claim-settling and goal-achievement and the optimum use it makes of its available resources. The productivity of public administration is thus defined both by an input-output relationship (efficiency) and the degree of goal achievement (effectiveness).

⁹ Bureaucratic productivity is here defined as the degree to which the public bureaucracy achieves its goals by means of minimum use of resources. It comprises both the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness. Cf. Warren F. Ilchman and Todd LaPorte, *Comparative Organizations* (forthcoming).

Nevertheless, when one attempts to operationalize the concept of productivity there are almost insuperable problems of measurement involved because these two elements — effectiveness and efficiency — share as a common referent a highly abstract and heterogeneous "product." Aside from the case of public enterprises engaged in the production of goods or services which lend themselves to quantification, most public organizations produce a type of "product" (i.e. education, public health, financial regulation, social welfare) which is difficult to quantify. Even when measurement is possible (i.e. number of university graduates, patients treated, etc.), the need to evaluate the quality and/or relative efficacy of the services rendered inevitably involves value-laden premises.

Economists have overcome these obstacles by resorting to a most singular expedient. In order to calculate the contribution of the public sector to the gross domestic product, they estimate that the aggregate value of the sector's output is equivalent to the total amount of resources applied to the functioning of the state apparatus, namely the amount paid to the factors of production intervening in the generation of its output. To adopt this procedure by analogy for operationalizing the concept of productivity would imply an open contradiction with our definition. For example, a higher amount of salaries paid to civil servants would not mean higher productivity but rather the opposite unless outputs increased proportionately. In any case, this approach has opened a new perspective for tackling the assessment problem.

In effect, since the analytic instruments available are inadequate for developing standards of efficiency or effectiveness which could be generalized to the entire public sector or significant segments thereof, there have been attempts to infer volume or quality of output departing from an examination of the inputs involved. On the basis of certain indicators about the quality of the resources employed or the appropriateness of their combination, these studies conclude that low quality or poorly designed arrangements can only result in low output or poor performance. This line of reasoning requires giving up the idea of finding *one* operational definition of performance and replacing it by a set of hypotheses suggesting a causal relationship between the constraints and stimuli to which inputs are subject and the type of product that ensues. However, most studies do not provide much theoretical support for demonstrating just how the level of performance is associated with certain input or process variables. In other words, the constellation of factors impinging upon the output of the public sector are treated in a schematic and non-scientific fashion.

Input-output models are useful insofar as the analysis takes into consideration the environmental constraints and historical background enveloping the activity of the state bureaucracy. Lacking this information, assessment is devoid of actual normative content and must rely on either formal goals, personal opinion or popular belief. To proceed otherwise implies a complete shift of emphasis since prior *to* asking *how much* performance there is, one must first be aware of *what kind* of performance is involved. Objective indicators of performance can be applied *once* appropriate standards of comparison and desired targets have been identified. If we agree that indicators become meaningful when actual results or observations are compared with some sort of standard or target, it will follow that standards and targets should be known before indicators can indicate anything.

It could be argued that devising standards, targets and indicators of bureaucratic performance requires information as to what is feasible, what is

desirable and what is actually happening *under given circumstances*. Hence, unless we hold "the circumstances" constant, no single indicator (or target, or standard) could claim to have universal applicability. The choice of indicators will depend upon the purpose sought and perspective of the potential user. In this sense, most indicators of bureaucratic performance possess the dubious quality of being hardly generalizable, even for the "same unit over time. For example, back in the early 1950's, at a time when the Internal Revenue Service of the United States was under congressional investigation and underwent a major reorganization, the Internal Revenue commissioners set an incredibly high marginal return ratio of 1:20 for additional audit activities, that is, for each additional dollar spent in audit, the Service promised to bring in twenty additional dollars in taxes. In more recent years, with a stronger and healthier organization, the ratio 1:6 became politically defensible.¹⁰

Clearly, these marginal figures are not scientifically justifiable on any grounds. If they were, it would mean that for each competing use of the funds, we would be able to obtain the same return at the margin, even reducing the analysis to a single goal. But different activities may work towards achieving this unique goal (e.g. maximization of revenue), namely collection of delinquent accounts, tax fraud investigation, or even tax education programs at schools. Hence, we must further clarify our goal and specify whether we want maximum revenue in the "short" or the "long run." As we can see, the picture begins to look rather gloomy, especially as we start introducing other goals into the analysis—a situation that comes closer to reality.

This example illustrates that although categories of indicators could be devised (i.e. the cost-revenue relationship may be objectively applied under the most varied circumstances), their meaning will not be universal. Insofar as indicators have built-in normative elements or value connotations, appraisal must be a discrete activity and should thus employ "custom-made" indicators.

Furthermore, regardless of the "universal" or "particularistic" quality of indicators, the assessment of administrative capability or performance should be based upon a broader conceptual framework. To show that certain standards have not been met according to the indicators at hand is not enough. It is also necessary to find out—among other things—what were the actual goals and targets sought and what were the competitive uses in which resources have been invested. Indeed, as should be evident, appraisal of administrative capability for development is dependent upon an acceptable theory and model of public administration. Accordingly, indicators will necessarily play a subordinate role and will only become meaningful once linked to a more encompassing analytic interpretation.

Of course, it may be contended that formal goals and targets set forth in organization charts and official plans and policies should provide the required referents for assessment purposes. However, this line of argument can be readily dismissed as soon as one considers those problems that the literature has labelled as "goal displacement," "role stress," and other forms of organizational adaptation to environmental or intra-administrative constraints. For instance, there might be little traffic control in the

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the reorganization process at the I.R.S., see Clara Penniman, "Reorganization and the Internal Revenue Service", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1961), pp. 121-30. The proposed ratios appear in the hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Senate and House of Representatives, for Department of Treasury and Post Office and Executive Office, Washington, D.C., various fiscal years.

streets or not much safety at night because the police force is employed in attempting to curb urban guerrilla activity. Crime statistics will then prove misleading as an indicator of police effectiveness. In another example, additional employees may be hired by a given agency due to social or political considerations (i.e. to reduce unemployment maintain political stability, etc.) rather than functional considerations, regardless of the volume of marginal output.

What is then the proper role of indicators in the assessment of bureaucratic performance?

3. On Assessing Bureaucratic Performance

Undoubtedly, the direction that research on bureaucratic performance and productivity has taken over the last two decades is proving to be misguided and fruitless. Hordes of social scientists and technical experts have literally invaded the non-Western, "less-developed" world, seeking to develop plausible explanations about the unproductive activity of public bureaucracies. But "they have not allowed the persisting uncertainties concerning the value-freedom of their approach overmuch to inhibit their empirical investigations, their attempts to comprehend other cultures, and their interpretation of behavior that is not self-evidently purposive and that might, in their terms, readily be regarded as non-rational."¹¹

The lack of a truly scientific paradigm, evidenced in the coexistence of several competing "schools" and approaches, has been no obstacle to the articulation of a certain consensus on the basic premises that should guide research. This consensus, or "surrogate paradigm" in Bodenheimer's terms, has been transferred to the field of Latin American studies—and, I would add, other area studies as well—and has come to dominate most empirical research carried out by foreign scholars and practitioners and many of their Third World colleagues! In essence, congruence among the various theories can only be explained by their common ideological underpinnings.¹²

Structural-functionalism, systems analysis, cybernetic models or quantitative comparative analysis, sharing a common deterministic bias and a pretended "objective" quality, have revealed a mindless lack of interest in the philosophical assumptions involved in social inquiry. They have compartmentalized the world into dichotomies and cells, and divided up history into stages along more or less sophisticated continua. Very often, they proved to be just a convenient smoke-screen behind which trivia and bewilderment could hide.

The study of public bureaucracy has not been immune to this fashion. Concrete bureaucratic systems have been pigeonholed into various typologies. They have been placed within the context of wider social systems ranging from "fusion" to "diffraction," from "Agraria" to "Industria," from "tradition" to "modernization." Theories of administrative productivity also are pervaded by a similar optimistic view of the course of history. Output has been defined as a dependent variable of the level of

¹¹B.R. Wilson, "A Sociologist's Introduction," in his edited volume, *Rationality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. vii.

¹² Susanne J. Bodenheimer has conveniently systematized this "surrogate paradigm" into four major issues. It is based on the premises that development is a cumulative and continuous process; that change should be brought about in a stable and orderly fashion; that increasing pluralism and political participation will take place through the diffusion of material benefits and cultural patterns from the more "modern" to the more "traditional" sectors of society and from the underdeveloped societies. See Susanne J. Bodenheimer, "The ideology of Developmentalism: American Political Science's Paradigm-Surrogate for Latin American Studies", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (1970).

political development which, in turn, could only be achieved by superimposing modern roles and cultural patterns upon traditional ones.

Hence, according to the standards developed in Western academic and technocratic circles, the performance of bureaucratic activity in Latin American countries would seem totally irrational. Explanations on the level of bureaucratic productivity are generally centred around certain aspects of intra-bureaucratic interaction or, in more psychologistic studies, on the values, perceptions and attitudes of civil servants in the process of bureaucratic socialization. Efforts to understand and overcome the "irrationality" of these structural and behavioural patterns gave rise to technical assistance missions and empirical studies of public bureaucracies of the Third World. Latin America, along with other segments of the "less developed" world, has become a huge social laboratory thus expanding the already promiscuous field available to Western bureau-pathologists.

As far as Latin American countries are concerned, I would suggest that the study of performance of their public bureaucracies should not be mechanically based on assumptions and frames of reference developed out of European or American case studies. Different environmental and cultural settings call for critical consideration and careful adjustments of our conceptual frameworks. A correct assessment of bureaucratic performance or a sensible appraisal of the prospects of changing bureaucratic institutions calls for a deep understanding of the historical conditions under which those institutions have developed. Such an assessment should also consider those environmental variables that contribute towards the shaping of the norms, structures and functions of the bureaucracy and ultimately to the modification of behavior and performance in ways congruent with the nature and sign of the stimuli. In more concrete terms, the prevailing philosophical or ideological orientation of the regime concerning the role of the state in society; the power position of the bureaucracy *vis-a-vis* the political regime; the degree of "openness" of the political system to the demands of pressure groups; the objective economic conditions of production and income distribution; and the degree of fulfilment of social expectations, are some of the crucial variables which ought to be duly weighed in any reliable diagnosis of bureaucratic productivity. This task amounts to more than simply identifying prismatic traits and becoming more or less sophisticated at describing them; it is rather a question of elaborating an acceptable theory capable of identifying—and interweaving—variables explaining the nature, volume and quality of bureaucratic output.

If such a broad understanding is lacking, indicators will prove useless. In my research on the Uruguayan bureaucracy, I was able to develop a good number of input and process indicators.¹³ Taken in isolation, however, these indicators proved insufficient for assessing

¹³ See Oscar Oszlak, *Diagnóstico de la Administración Pública Uruguaya*. Technical Report (New York: United Nations, 1972). Among others, the following indicators were constructed: *Indexes of supervision*, that is, the relationship between the number of officials at two different hierarchical levels, which may provide an idea about the functioning of the administrative career, the control system, etc. Number of *newly-created para-state organizations*, which serves to gauge the extent to which the government relies on the established bureaucracy or looks for more flexible ways of handling certain types of claims. Alternatively, it may suggest a greater or smaller degree of state intervention in socio-economic affairs, a more or less active participation of private interests in government, etc. *Figures on double or multiple employment, attendance and strikes*, indicative of the degree of morale, dedication to public office, supervision, functioning of the system of sanctions, etc. *Employees personal traits (i.e. age, sex, education, years of service)* cross-tabulated with structural variables (*rank, functional class, sector and unit*), a kind of information which is useful for detecting training needs, reconsidering promotion policies, deciding on compulsory retirement, etc. *Salary levels and policies cross-tabulated with structural variables*, which, when observed through time, are invaluable for discovering situations of inequity or discrimination; inferring dissatisfaction, low motivation, etc. *Allocation of resources by item of expense, economic-functional criteria or unit*,

the performance of a global system such as the public bureaucracy, much less do they explain the causes for poor performance. The literature, however, is full of studies and reports based on even less elaborate indicators, which obviously implies even more dubious conclusions. For example, with reference to the Uruguayan political system and the role or performance of its public bureaucracy, different authors have arrived at widely opposite conclusions.¹⁴ If we were to follow Almond and Coleman, Uruguay would appear as a model of a competitive political system in which the bureaucracy "over-participates" neither in the "governing" nor in "political" functions of the polis.¹⁵ Contradicting this sanguine analysis, Banks and Textor, whose index of bureaucratic development is highly ambiguous, would have us believe that the Uruguayan bureaucracy belongs in the same category with less democratic nations (sic) such as Honduras, Paraguay, Guatemala and Ecuador. They describe it as "semi-modern, i.e., a largely 'rationalized' bureaucratic structure of limited efficiency because of shortages of skilled personnel, inadequacy of recruitment or performance criteria, excessive intrusion by non-administrative organs or partially non-congruent social institutions," whatever these are.¹⁶ As a *coup de grace*, Irma Adelman and Cynthia Morris, whose index of bureaucratic efficiency is of similarly dubious accuracy, consider the Uruguayan bureaucracy as a "well-trained civil service with no instability of policy, little widespread corruption, and no observable inefficiency." On Adelman and Morris' 100-point scale, Uruguay is ranked 80 points above the countries with which it is equated by Banks and Textor.¹⁷ If a good empirical test of the accuracy or inaccuracy of these indicators were needed, recent political developments in Uruguay would clearly dismiss this sort of adventurous speculation. Indeed, early in 1973, and immediately following the military coup, the regime announced as its main goals to end the widespread corruption, inconsistent policies and downright inefficiency—exact opposites of the Adelman and Morris' "findings".

It is not redundant to insist on the fact that the difficulties with these studies arise from a superficial examination of the data and a lack of understanding of the specificity of bureaucratic development in different areas of the world. Thus, far from being an outgrowth of an increasing process of rationality in economic and social life, the advent and growth of bureaucratic institutions in Latin America replicate the dislocations of a productive structure consolidated under the auspices of underdevelopment and dependence. Let me be more specific about this contention. In the so-called developed countries, the process of industrial expansion grew *pari passu* with rural exodus and the rise of bureaucratic organizations capable of increasing and buttressing the rationality of the capitalist mode of production (CMP). Within these contexts bureaucratic productivity had a distinct meaning: As a criterion for defining output and performance, it was inextricably associated with a particular ethic, a given mode of production, and a resulting social formation.

In contrast, the genesis and subsequent development of the state bureaucracy in Latin American countries took place under different circumstances. In the beginning, the administrative apparatus served the interests of the Spanish Crown and represented the most efficacious means for administering the extraction, processing, and consignment of colonial goods to the imperial head-quarters. With independence, the new Latin American nations inherited, as part of the colonial legacy, the heavy

which show the actual use to which resources have been put and allows an approximation to the "true" nature of the goals sought by the bureaucracy.

¹⁴ I wish to express my gratitude to William M. Berenson for calling the following contradictory statements to my attention.

¹⁵ Gabriel Almond and James Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960).

¹⁶ Arthur Banks and Robert Textor, *A Cross-Polity Survey* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1964).

¹⁷ Irma Adelman and Cynthia Morris, *Society, Politics and Economic Development: A Quantitative Approach* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

bureaucratic machinery of the empire. However, the tradition of *laissez faire*, the "caudillismo" phenomenon,¹⁸ and the difficulties for national integration combined to maintain the development of bureaucratic institutions within reasonable and controllable proportions. The recurrent waves of immigration—another specific phenomenon of Latin America¹⁹—along with a number of world events that had local repercussion—economic crises, wars, working class movements, or changes in the hegemonic position of industrialized countries and consequent modification of the patterns of international trade and dependence of the periphery—greatly modified the role of the state. The incipient industrialization required an active regulation of the new economic activity and labor relationships which resulted from the expansion of the CMP in these countries. However, the subordination of the Latin American economies to the interests of the hegemonic countries curtailed the development of an integrated industry; only the production of raw materials and manufactures with low technological requirements could be fostered as a result of this predicament. In addition, the situation of structural dependence subjected the peripheral economies to the whims of world demand, featured by regulated prices and market constraints.²⁰

Under these circumstances, the industrial sector was unable to absorb the excess labor force expelled by a stagnant rural sector. Stagnation, in turn, resulted from an irrational²¹ system of land exploitation and an anachronistic and iniquitous system of ownership and tenure—another typical Latin American phenomenon. The state thus assumed the role of employer of the idle labor force displaced by the rural sector which was unable to find other opportunities of productive employment. The possibilities of fulfilling this new role were greatly enhanced by the growing share of economic surplus that the state was able to appropriate.

On the other hand, the necessity to regulate the emerging conflicts between the interests of national industrial bourgeoisie and those of the rural-financial bourgeoisie associated with grand international capital, led to the expansion of a bureaucratic infrastructure often guided by contradictory goals and policies. From this brief summary, one may conclude that the activity of the state apparatus in Latin America does not respond exclusively to an economic need—namely to accompany the process of productive rationality built in the CMP—but, especially, to a social need (e.g. to soften the effects of structural unemployment inherent in any dependent economy) and a political necessity (e.g. to maintain a certain equilibrium among the interests of the dominant classes of society, to further the interests of professional politicians, grantors of prebends and sinecures in return to party loyalties, etc.)²²

4. Some Theoretical Remarks on Role Conflict and Productivity

The foregoing comments may be useful for solving the apparent contradiction between, let us say, the "positive" vision of bureaucracy as the highest form of rational-productive organization which could coexist with a CMP, and the negative popular

¹⁸ An expression alluding to the particular type of political organization established in several Latin American countries after independence, which was featured by national disunity, an outcry for local autonomy and subordination to a "caudillo" — a strong and charismatic leader.

¹⁹ Specific in the sense that the stage of development of these economies did not allow for a substantial absorption of the new waves of immigrants into manufacturing and other secondary activities. As their access to the land was also curtailed, they helped to expand the tertiary sector.

²⁰ See, for instance Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependencia y Desarrollo en America Latina* (México: Siglo XXI, 1969); or, for a general survey, Osvaldo Sunkel and Pedro Paz, *El Subdesarrollo Latinoamericano y la Teoría del Desarrollo* (México: Siglo XXI, 1970). Also see Luis Macadar, Nicolás Reig and José E. Santías, "Una Economía Latinoamericana," in L. Benvenuto *et al.*, *Uruguay Hoy* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Argentina, 1971).

²¹ Irrational from the point of view of the social interest, not necessarily from that of the individual producer.

²² See F. H. Cardoso and E. Faletto, *op.*

vision of the state apparatus, which "evokes the slowness, the ponderousness, the routine, the complication of procedures, and the maladapted responses of 'bureaucratic' organizations to the needs which they should satisfy. . ."23 How can these two extreme visions be reconciled? Formally, bureaucracies have tended to adopt similar form of organization and functioning, regardless of the characteristics of the social context or the prevailing mode of production. Nevertheless, this isomorphism should not restrain us from making certain observations as to the *junction* that these organisms perform, the explanation of which owes much to the differing conditions of birth and growth which mark their institutional life. It is evident that bureaucratic organizations have a distinctive dynamics which is noticeable in any context—hence the concept of "bureaucratization" as a pattern, present in the works of Weber, Crozier, Lefort and others. Despite similar dynamics, however, the insertion of a bureaucracy within a given social context may not only differentially effect its structure and functioning but also may significantly modify the nature of the products generated.

In this latter sense, we are not referring to an ubiquitous pattern of social organization, but to a conmakes one bureaucracy different roles and thus performs diverse social functions. Even though bureaucratic organizations share certain peculiar features that can be recognized in the administrative apparatus of almost any state, we should carefully distinguish what crete unit which assumes different from another when we observe the goals sought, the interests represented, and the consequences derived from its social function. The traditional dichotomy—guardian state-interventionist state—does not exhaust the spectrum since the problem should be observed in other dimensions. State intervention in the economic sphere through direct exploitation of industrial and commercial enterprises, whether in competition or not with the private sector, has totally different characteristics from intervention in social life (e.g. regulation of class struggle, promotion of community welfare, etc.) or in political life (e.g. military intervention, "regulation" of the processes of "political institutionalization,"24 etc.)

Hence, if the functions are different, so are the concrete consequences of bureaucratic activities and the standards and indicators to be used in measuring or evaluating productivity. The problem should not be reduced, then, merely to "counting" bridges built, patients treated, administrative claims settled, students promoted, or telephones installed as compared with the targets fixed or the resources employed, but should also include "products" as heterodoxical as potential unemployed absorbed, strikes avoided, party interests furthered, sectoral benefits preserved, insurrectional threats suppressed, and so forth.

Notice that this way of looking at the problem does not imply a redefinition of "bureaucratic productivity," but rather a more precise conceptualization and extension of the concept to include the set of "products" resulting from the activity of the state bureaucracy. If we agree that the bureaucracy assumes different roles, namely as claimant to the extent that it advances its own interests), as mediator and representative of certain sectoral or class interests *vis-a-vis* the state's adjudicatory power, or as producer of goods, regulations, and services furthering the "public interest"—conventionally its specific mission—it becomes

²³ See Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 12-13.

²⁴ An interesting case in point is the recent situation in Argentina where a sizeable amount of resources has been spent in order to make possible the transition from the military to a constitutional regime.

obvious that the analysis of output cannot be reduced to the latter function—precisely the most visible and vulnerable to popular judgment. Rather it must comprise the totality of goals achieved in performing its various roles. And I say that this does not imply a conceptual redefinition because productivity—both in its efficiency and its effectiveness denotations—is indissolubly tied to the notion of "goal," that is, to a concept having a clear value-laden connotation. Consequently, insofar as goals are multi-dimensional, heterogeneous, and conflicting, the results of state activity cannot be exclusively evaluated according to those goals which are /currently identified with the vague notion of the "general interest."²⁵ But if this is done, we should at least be aware of the limited scope of our evaluations and of those aspects which are excluded of the analysis.²⁶

Even though the concept of productivity, as employed in here, maintains its current meaning, it acquires on the other hand a considerable analytic richness which is worth exploring in order to demystify the study of public bureaucracy and to place the examination of its effectiveness and efficiency on a more realistic and promising level. In the first place, the identification of different roles and of functions which promote varied and often conflicting interests opens a wide field for analytic exploration and compels scholars to revise the instruments of measurement and evaluation on the empirical front. In the second place, the framework of premises and assumptions on which administrative reformers have traditionally built their strategies of change as well as the nature of the formulae which—now from a prescriptive viewpoint—they have voiced in every political forum where they found any sort of audience, requires radical modification.

Because of its very realism, rupture with formal schema and conventional interpretations, and confrontation with the irrational substratum which is often hidden behind a facade of functional rationality, this approach may appear somewhat cynical and, as such, vulnerable. Certainly it could at least be accused of being hardly operational insofar as the normative assumptions of the administrative reformer remain unaltered. After all, to function under *ceteris paribus* and *mutatis mutandis* assumptions, that is, by dealing with one variable (e.g. a role, a type of function) and viewing every other aspect of the problem as parameters or constants, is always more "operational" than to have these "untidy" factors intervening as variables with an equal or higher degree of determination. Put another way, if in concrete situations our interest on the productivity of the state apparatus is limited to finding out the degree to which

²⁵ J. F. Kobertson rejects altogether the possibility of finding objective measures of efficiency (as defined for economics) in the operation of the public sector, inasmuch as means and ends in government activity must receive close attention before a final judgment is passed on efficiency. See his article, "Efficiency and Economy in the New Zealand Public Service." *New Zealand Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 28, No.1 (September 1958).

²⁶ It should be pointed out that this approach to the problem does not imply a division between "manifest" functions (e.g. legitimate, intended and anticipated) and "latent" functions (illegitimate, unintended, and unanticipated). I believe that the variety of roles performed by the bureaucracy and the heterogeneity—and foreseeable *conflict*—among the products or consequence of its activity correspond to a complex structural reality where different actors, roles, interests and values are engaged in conflicting patterns of interaction. In this sense, the possible "dysfunctions" which arise in performing one role are compensated by the "eufunctions" inherent to the performance of another role. Therefore, the "functional" or "dysfunctional" quality of the structural arrangement cannot be evaluated simply on the basis of the *explicit* (which is not the same thing as "manifest") needs or goals that the structure is trying to fulfill. I think that here lies one of the basic deficiencies of structural-functionalism. For further critiques, see Paul Oquist and Oscar Oszlak, "Estructural Funcionalismo: Un Análisis Crítico de su Estructura y Función," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (1970).

the goals that have been formally assigned to it have been achieved or determining the volume of resources that have been spent for such purpose, our analytic choice will consist of considering its other roles and functions either as explanatory variables of the outcome or as parameters. If, on the other hand, our interest is a prescriptive one, there is no choice but to broaden our field of variables, *unless* we content ourselves with increasing the volume of inconsequential recipes. I contend that the choice is clear-cut because the solution of the problem which concerns us will necessarily provoke consequences with regard to other aspects (e.g. other roles, other functions) of bureaucratic productivity. In other words, the elimination of the "dysfunctions" inherent in a given role will imply the elimination of the "eufunctions" inherent in the other roles. The elimination of political clientage as an instrument for promoting civil servants will bring about the elimination of the politicizing function of the spoils system. A pattern of resource allocation which observed criteria of "social" priority—as opposed to "regime" priority—would probably decrease the means of coercion at the disposal of the regime. Unless there was a simultaneous creation of job opportunities aimed at expanding the labor market for absorbing the displaced labor force, the strict enforcement of criteria of administrative rationality would throw a large mass of unemployed into private "inactivity." And so it goes.

Of course, there are some obvious difficulties in avoiding role conflict. The performance of different roles may oppose the bureaucracy to various interest groups or to the government itself, but it may also allow it to reconcile their interests by assuming an arbitrating role. However, as conflict is generally circumscribed and today's opponents may become tomorrow's supporters, the vulnerability of bureaucracy is truly negligible; the performance of its multifarious roles will secure its survival no matter how effectively or efficiently it achieves its public goals.²⁷

This observation has important, theoretical and practical consequences with respect to bureaucratic productivity and its appraisal. When references are made to this subject we generally think in terms of the "infrastructural" role of bureaucracy, without even considering its "mediating" or its "sectoral" (e.g. self-seeking) role. Hence, to raise the problem of productivity of public administration requires a prior decision as to what aspects (or what roles) of bureaucratic activity are involved. The operational consequences derived from reducing the analysis to only one role, while over-looking or neglecting the rest, will differ from those resulting from a more comprehensive examination of bureaucratic performance.

In conclusion, it might be contended that bureaucratic productivity should be so construed as to encompass the various "products" turned out by the state apparatus and that this approach may lead to far more significant conclusions—both analytical and practical—than if performance were assessed in terms of a single role. Insofar as the bureaucracy reflects the contradictions of the social system, role performance may require the settlement of conflicting claims at the expense of violating conventional criteria of productive rationality. An interesting corollary of this proposition would be that efforts to reduce conflict of roles and make them mutually compatible may not necessarily result in higher productivity.²⁸ Zero-sum assumptions do not apply. Bureaucracies may deliberately

²⁷ Notice that I use the term "vulnerability" in a most restricted sense, namely the degree to which the system is faced with uncertainty about its basic survival. The bureaucracy may otherwise be "penetrated" by interest groups, and in this sense it would certainly be vulnerable.

²⁸ A similar conclusion is reached by Fleming, who discusses the problem of role stress in a colonial bureaucratic milieu and the consequences on efficiency and goal achievement resulting from relative

seek to increase the incongruity of roles and reduce the output resulting from one type of activity in order to increase the overall level of performance. Therefore, unless the indicators used for assessing bureaucratic systems give due consideration to these caveats, any evaluation will fail to detect the more critical variables that account for the volume and quality of administrative performance.

emphases on various roles. See William G. Fleming, "Authority, Efficiency and Role Stress: Problems in the Development of East African Bureaucracies," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 3 (December, 1966), pp. 386-404.