



The Processes of Institutionalization

The discussion of institutionalization in social agencies up to this point has, by necessity, been somewhat vague, abstract, and theoretical. We attempt to clarify a number of those questions in part III. Through a series of chapters on the nature of institutionalization in organizations, planning, implementation, operation, and evaluation, we endeavor to flesh out these abstractions and show their relationship to the practice of social administration.¹

That institutionalization is a major macrosocial process in human affairs there should be no doubt. In the modern world, institutionalization is the process whereby the habits, rituals, and routines of daily life (in the case of this book, work life) give meaning and structure to our lives. When, in discussing human behavior, we speak of social structure, it is largely the products of such institutional development that we recognize and relate to. Institutionalization comes in two principal forms in social administration. First, there is the steady, gradual, unplanned accumulation of habits, rituals, and routines (portions of which are called by such labels as policies and procedures, informal organizations, and task environments). Second, there

are those deliberate, intentional efforts at creating, changing, or eliminating established and meaningful behavior patterns, which we sum up here with the term *institution building*. The term deliberately subsumes many related aspects of planning, program development, policy practice, and social change as these are experienced in the administrative setting.

Indeed, institutionalization is in many respects a living, organic process, as the many references to the "life cycles" of institutions attest. We can easily speak of the birth, death, development, and reincarnation of institutions, in almost human terms. We need to exercise care, however, in drawing too many close parallels between the cycles of human institutions and the life cycles of human beings. Individual humans generally live a relatively fixed life cycle, shortened only by disease and accident, up to a more or less absolute maximum physical limit somewhere above age 100. Even though social institutions may appear to be similarly finite in nature, some have proven themselves remarkably capable of cycles of renewal and change quite unlike any known forms of human longevity. The institutions of enduring major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam have long histories stretching over many centuries and characterized by many cycles of degeneration and renewal that often transcend the lives of many generations of human participants. Though social services in their modern, twentieth-century form have yet to attain such long-lasting status, some forms of social service institutions, such as residential care facilities for children, infirm old people, and various other categories of socially dependent populations, have been around for many centuries. From the perspective of institutional history, twentieth-century professional social services may turn out to be simply the product of a particular cycle of institutional renewal sparked by the social conditions of late nineteenth-century industrial society.

Be that as it may, we know also that some institutions, such as families, have built-in means of renewal and replacement of members, whereas in others, such as formal organizations, the problem is one of *telesis*, or the conscious, deliberate use of knowledge to attempt to renew or improve them.² Family systems such as traditional villages appear capable of existing for many hundreds of generations without outside interference. By contrast, formal organizations do not even get formed, much less have any hope of continuing, without some measure of social telesis.

In the first five chapters, we explore the general process of institutionalization in organizations and four moments or phases in the cycle of institutionalization of social agencies: planning, implementation, operations, and evaluation. The reader should take note that these four phases form a *logical* cycle but not necessarily an empirical one. There are no great, uni-