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## Social Administration: An Overview

**O**rganized social services face greater challenges now than at any time in the past half century. Movement away from a grants economy has been coupled with the spread of managed care, the increasing growth and legitimacy of the social work profession, and the proliferation of a new breed of social administrators who must be part entrepreneur and part technocrat. The implications of those challenges for social agencies and the social work profession are many and far-reaching. One important practice arena in which many of the challenges and opportunities facing social work and social services come to bear most directly is in social administration, which is the study and practice of management, leadership, decision making, and institution building in social service.

This book provides an introduction to the study and practice of social administration. The term itself is not new, but it may be unfamiliar to the reader. Several decades ago, the British scholar David Donnison (1961) defined social administration as “the study of the development, structure and practices of the social services.” To this we would add “and the methods used to initiate, develop, foster, and maintain them.” Within the United States, Simon Slavin (1978), the founding editor of the journal *Administra-*

*tion in Social Work*, was among the foremost advocates of this term. We appreciate not only Slavin's use of the term, but also his intent. Slavin and Perlmutter (1980) wrote that "executive leadership in social administration must be grounded in the fundamental values and historical concerns of the social work profession." Archie Hanlon (1978) wrote that

social administration moves toward the opinion that knowledge and skills of the (social work) profession are interrelated not only with the social sciences but also with the values, priorities, and resources of the larger social institutions. Thus, social administration focuses on the policies, planning, and administration of social welfare goods and services in relation to the political, social, and economic institutions and to the determinants of the distribution of national<sup>1</sup> resources to social welfare needs. (p. 55)

Any adequate conception of social administration is not merely instrumental, concerned with completing the task at hand, but also clearly normative, concerned with judgments about whether the task is worth doing. As Abels and Murphy (1981) stated, "The purpose of administration is to provide the resources and structural and psychological supports necessary to insure that the agency will function in a manner leading to positive consequences for the client served and, ultimately, to a more just society" (p. 9). Social administrators are not technicians and tacticians, but moral actors. It is in this concern for building and maintaining the institutions of a just society where much of the distinctive content of social administration is grounded.

More than two decades ago, Dumpson, Mullen, First, and Harder (1978) noted the

absence of systematic frameworks or models for organizing existing social welfare administrative practice knowledge. While considerable potentially relevant knowledge has been developed by various disciplines around what administrators in social welfare settings should know, it has not been systematically organized or utilized in ways that will promote effective social welfare administrative practice. (p. 33)

Since that time, there has been a substantial body of work devoted to laying out various partial frameworks and detailed models, and it can truly be said that administrative practice knowledge in social work has expanded considerably. (Compare, for example, Slavin [1978] with Patti [2000].) To date, however, an up-to-date general framework for encompassing the entire topic of social administration has been notably absent. There have been a number of management textbooks, to be sure, but generally these have

offered only partial coverage of the topic. The premise of several is the alluring but highly misleading notion that effective social administration involves the mastery of a limited range of skills and techniques. We believe that there is value in a single viewpoint alongside the plurality of diverse views.

In writing this book, we set out to provide a comprehensive introductory overview that emphasizes the conceptual and theoretical aspects of social administration. The most basic framework of this book is a four-part model of social administration. The term *social administration* is used throughout this book to refer to these related phenomena:

1. Management of social services<sup>2</sup>
2. Efforts to encourage, develop, and exercise leadership of social services at all levels
3. Organizational and institutional policy making and other decision making affecting the purposes, strategies, and direction of social services<sup>3</sup>
4. Institution-building efforts to ensure the continuation of viable social services

Throughout the book, the terms *administration* and *management* are often used interchangeably. This is in marked contrast to a number of earlier social work sources that have sought to make a major distinction between the two terms. For example, Abels and Murphy (1981) quote former National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Executive Director Chauncey Alexander: "Administration is viewed as focusing on efficiency—the direction and improvement of existing systems—while management is thought to encompass the additional responsibility of obtaining or redirecting resources or markets for new opportunities and thus to effectiveness" (p. 9). Others have attempted to make similar distinctions without notable success. We believe that concern for efficiency, systems improvement, resource development, exploiting new opportunities, and effectiveness are part of a single bundle, and within the broader practice community, sometimes it seems clearer to call that bundle administration; sometimes, management.

Although the terms *management* and *administration* are frequently used interchangeably, we hold to one consistent and rather subtle difference. Management refers to internal concerns of existing organizations, whereas social administration also encompasses the full sweep of leadership, decision making, and institution building. Thus, social administrators must, of necessity, also be managers. One would hope that managers in the social services also have the breadth of vision and incisive judgment to be social administrators as well.

One of the major points of emphasis in our perspective is the integral relationship between social administration, social services, and the social work profession. It continues to be the case, as Slavin noted in 1980, that

the current national emphasis on efficiency, cost containment, and quantifiable objectives often mythologizes management and its power, and tends to lead to a narrow technicism which will "set matters right." The reliance on technically trained managers, drawn from disciplines often removed from the experience of the social services in many of the public bureaucracies dealing with human need, has created as many problems for client service integrity as it has solved.  
(p. xx)

In our view, this statement should not be read simply as a matter of disciplinary preference. Trained social workers have proved to be as capable of their own types of narrow technicism as managers from accounting, management, or public administration backgrounds. The challenge for anyone seeking to manage and lead social services is to transcend such limits.

In this chapter, we examine the issue of where knowledge of the four basic components of social administration properly fits in the social work curriculum and within the general practice of social work. This issue involves a number of questions that have troubled social work educators and practitioners for a long time and with which every student taking a course in social administration must grapple.

Foremost among these questions is this: Why is it necessary and how is it possible to connect the seemingly straightforward wish to help others with the seemingly remote, arcane, and esoteric concerns of organizing, programs, strategies, budgets, costs, efficiencies, and the other exotic topics that arise in social administration? Why can't we just simplify things? The honest answer, of course, is that it may not be necessary to deliver social services using professionals in formal organizations. There certainly are other ways to approach the solving of social problems. However, organized, professional social services were the medium of choice throughout most of the twentieth century and continue to be so in the early years of this millennium. Within the institutional context of social welfare thus laid down, the simplest explanation for both formal organization and professionalization may be found in the twentieth-century phenomena of the rationalization of social relations, which interested and troubled Max Weber and a host of other social critics.<sup>4</sup>

Organized and administered social service delivery is a fact of life in all human services. As many a caseworker or therapist who has gone into private practice has learned, the concerns and details that are the special province of social administration cannot easily be wished away in the real world.

Contracts and budgets must be negotiated, plans must be drawn up, strategy and purpose must be clear, and reports must be completed and submitted to funders for the service enterprise to continue. Various external constituencies must be dealt with. The real world of social service practice involves complex and tricky resource, decision, and evaluation issues, and these issues are realities that must be confronted. The daily demands of social administration—in such diverse forms as supervision, reporting requirements, and coping with resource limitations—are part of the practice experience of all social workers, no matter what else it may say in their titles or job descriptions.

The concerns of social administration that we present here are among the major preoccupations of professional leaders and most MSW-level social workers. One school of social work recently polled the members of its faculty about their actual practice experience as opposed to their practice preferences or teaching interests. It was discovered that all of them—100 percent—had prior administrative experience as supervisors, program managers, budget managers, or executives in managing inventories of supplies and equipment, in managing cases, or in some other capacity. Many recent MSW graduates move into administrative support positions early in their professional careers (Sherwood, 1979). The stereotype of the independent therapist alone in her cozy office, giving solace to troubled clients who are hers exclusively, and free from the demands of contracts, budgets, and schedules is largely a pipe dream far removed from the realities of contemporary social work practice. Social work practice is still largely agency practice—even if the agency is very small—and agency practice is not possible without some measure of social administration.

Even as students are adjusting their gaze to fit these realities, however, these daily realities of social administration are changing before our eyes. Just as the global economy has changed the rules of the management game in business management, it is also exercising subtle but profound influences upon the practice of social administration (Mitroff, Mohrman, & Little, 1987). Devolution, managed care, welfare reform, the private practice of social work outside the traditional community agency, the growth of multidisciplinary nonprofit management: these and a score of other contemporary influences are changing the rules of the game for social administration practice. No one can say for sure what the implications for social services may be ten years from now. However, five things are clear:

1. A large and growing number of tasks of the type we associate in this book with social administration will be involved in making whatever transition may be necessary. This may involve hiring qualified people, planning and directing new and innovative programs, establishing adequate infor-

mation systems, negotiating contracts and provider agreements, and a good deal more.

2. Large measures of creative, flexible, and decisive leadership will be demanded in the continuing assault on social problems by the profession, agencies, and programs. If social workers no longer wish to provide that leadership, then others must and will rise to the occasion.

3. Present trends are (as always) paradoxical and difficult to interpret. It is within the realm of possibility that the social agency as it evolved during what we call the "age of grants" (roughly 1965–1980) will soon be a thing of the past, rendered obsolete by the new economics of limited public funding, increasing donations, and the exigencies of managed care. It is equally possible that the renewed emphasis on service contracting during the 1990s signaled the beginning of a genuine renaissance of the social agency, if only we had been able to read the signals more clearly. No one can say for sure what the future of social service will be.

4. When we look back years from now, it will probably be clear that a small number of key or critical decisions were decisive in determining the strategic directions that social agencies and the social service field actually took. Passage of a single piece of legislation, the Social Security Act, for example, marked the end of a 300-year-old local poor law system in the United States and defined much of the modern structure of social services.

5. Social agencies and other institutions of American social welfare will have been shaped and molded by events and joined by additional, new, as-yet-unknown institutions designed to deal with emerging new problems and new ways of viewing old problems. All this will not have happened randomly or automatically but through the deliberate, continuous efforts of those engaged in social administration.

The four constant elements in these observations—management, leadership, critical decision making, and institution building—are the essential concerns of social administration as we approach it in this book.

There are at least 300,000 nonprofit social service organizations in the United States as well as public social services bureaucracies in all fifty states (Salamon, 1992). There are also an uncounted number of social service units in commercial<sup>5</sup> corporations (hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers, and a broad range of general businesses).

Independent nonprofit social agencies continue to be a major venue for social service delivery. A study of MSW graduates in twenty-one programs found that more than 50 percent were employed in nonprofit settings; about 25 percent, in public settings; and 18 percent, in commercial organizations (Beaucar, 1999). The vast majority of these public and private organizations

are administered organizations, that is, they are (1) social groups characterized by planned and orderly social relations grounded in rules (2) with staffs of employees hired and paid for their expertise in social problem solving and (3) led by paid, appointed officials designated as leaders empowered to make critical decisions using criteria such as quality, efficiency, and effectiveness and (4) expected to create, nurture, and maintain these organizations as enduring social institutions at least until such times as the social problems they are to address may be resolved.

### **SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION DEFINED**

In general, as noted earlier, we use the term *social administration* throughout to designate the full range of concerns in this book. The phrase is short and easy to remember. Social administration is an organizational reality in all administered organizations and concerned principally with the four domains of management, leadership, decision making, and institution building. Management is concerned primarily with creating viable organizations and programs, maintaining order and guiding change, facilitating the assignment and completion of social work and related social service tasks, discovering and utilizing human and financial resources, maintaining worker morale and client/consumer satisfaction, and making organizational policy and enforcing rules. Leadership is personal behavior and organizational roles that guide and direct the purpose and meaning of the efforts of others. Leadership in social administration is generally of five principal types: community, policy, agency, program, and professional. In social administration, critical decisions address issues of policy, strategy, program, operations, and resources. Institution building is a long-term concern for creating and sustaining vision, defining mission and strategy, and public representation of community, agency, program, and professional purposes.

Social administration has long been understood to be an important aspect of social work practice and one that inevitably shapes, molds, and reaches deep into the domain of micro or clinical practice. Weissman, Epstein, and Savage (1983) perhaps spoke for the entire profession when they said, "The everyday activities of most clinical social workers involve the performance of a variety of helping roles that in varying degrees require both administrative and therapeutic knowledge and skill." Yet, much of the social work curriculum does not truly reflect this. Attempts to operationalize this dualistic nature of social work practice have often attempted to reconstruct administrative knowledge and skills within the dominant models of therapeutic language and imagery. We are proceeding instead from the assumption woven throughout the human services management movement

of the past thirty years that administrative situations must be understood in themselves for what they are.

Administration has been important in the social services since before the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 institutionalized the concept of overseers of the poor in English law.<sup>6</sup> Yet, administrative content has never played a particularly large or important role in the social work curriculum. Social administration was, in fact, a rather late arrival in social work education. A course in administration was first offered in a school of social work in 1914, nearly two decades after other training courses for social work first appeared. The first social work courses offered in the 1890s were directed at preparation of what today are called direct service workers. It seems to be the case that the social administrators responsible for setting up such training programs did not at first judge themselves to be as much in need of training as their workers.

It was not until 1944 that the curriculum statement of the American Association of Schools of Social Work included administration as one of eight basic methods defining social work.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, many schools of social work have tended to offer small clusters of social administration courses at the graduate level that include only limited or no coverage of administrative topics in introductory practice courses. Social administration topics are often not covered at all in undergraduate programs. Despite this rather limited coverage, all the recent approaches to the definition of social work emphasize the pervasive role of social administration in social work practice. For example, the 1992 Curriculum Policy Statement issued by the Council on Social Work Education identified the following four purposes of professional social work:

1. The promotion, restoration, maintenance, or enhancement of the functioning of individuals, families, groups, *organizations and communities* by helping them to accomplish life tasks, prevent and alleviate distress, and utilize resources
2. The planning, development, and implementation of social policies, services, resources, and programs needed to meet basic human needs and support the development of human capacities and abilities
3. The pursuit of such policies, services, resources, and programs through organizational or administrative advocacy and social or political action, including the empowerment of groups at risk
4. The development and testing of professional knowledge and skills related to these purposes. [emphasis added] (Commission on Accreditation, 1994)

The first purpose could be seen as a predominantly direct practice objective, although enhancing the functioning of organizations and commu-



nities certainly falls at least partially within the domain of social administration as we deal with it here.<sup>8</sup> The fourth purpose relates most closely to research and scholarly activity and thus to all other practice specialties equally. The remaining two objectives are both purposive statements in which the predominant accent is social administration.

Examination of the NASW's definition of social work as a profession with three basic objectives will support much the same conclusion. The portion of the statement identifying the importance of meeting basic human needs is arguably a clinical practice statement. However, the remaining two basic purposes of social work (promoting effective/humane operations and linking people with resources) have clear social administrative dimensions. Thus, despite the minor role sometimes assigned to social administration in the curriculum, the distinctive concerns and interests of social administration loom large in contemporary definitions of social work by practicing professionals and by educators.

The importance of social administration in social work can also be gauged by examining the practice experience of past and present professional leaders in the field. Although those with job titles as administrators are always a minority of all the social workers involved in organized helping efforts, a close examination of social work leadership reveals a very different picture. Virtually the entire leadership of American social services throughout the twentieth century has come from the ranks of social administrators. And in both past and present, much of that social work leadership has been engaged directly and primarily in the practice of social administration. One of the icons of the field, Jane Addams, was not only the founder of Hull House settlement and a leader in the settlement house movement in the United States for more than forty years but also the treasurer (for ten years), and she served as president of the Hull House Association and head resident (roughly the equivalent of executive director today) of Hull House throughout her entire career.<sup>9</sup> Addams was preeminently a manager, leader, decision maker, and institution builder.

Less known, perhaps, but equally telling is the important social administration role of one of the icons of clinical practice, Mary Richmond. Usually accorded a role as the founding mother of social casework, Richmond never actually worked as a caseworker or direct practitioner of any other kind. She simply could not have developed her perspective in social casework from personal experience alone. Richmond was, like so many others in the social work leadership pantheon, primarily a social administrator. She began her career with the Baltimore Charity Organization Society (COS), not as a friendly visitor but as assistant treasurer. She later became director of the COS in Baltimore, then directed the Philadelphia COS, and

moved to the Russell Sage Foundation as director of the Charity Organization Department, where she remained for the rest of her career.

That Addams and Richmond were deeply involved in defining aspects of social work practice goes without saying. Much the same can be said for Robert Hartley, Homer Folks, Edith and Grace Abbot, Harry Hopkins, Paul Kellogg, Florence Kelley, Wilbur Cohen, and countless others typically included among the social work leadership pantheon. Indeed, in recent decades, academics (faculty members in schools of social work) and social administrators are the two most consistently visible groups among the national leadership of professional social work; much the same is true in many states. Social administrators may not be a representative cross-section of the profession as a whole, but they have always been heavily represented among the leaders of the profession—so much so that it is reasonable to define leadership as one of the components of social administration practice.

In keeping with these historical realities, we wish to suggest that social administration is, in fact, the most inclusive form of social work practice. It is a mode of practice that by its very nature encompasses, incorporates, and embraces the highest aspirations of the profession and the concerns of all other aspects of practice of social work within its view. This is the primary reason why social work has been correct in its long-term assertion that the administration of social agencies should be in the hands of social work professionals. Such a view is not a simple expression of professional hegemony.

Far from being an occult specialty practiced indirectly in remote, obscure corners of the profession, social administration is concerned with creating the very conditions of social service that make professional and paraprofessional service delivery possible. It is the task of social administration to mobilize the people and other resources necessary to carry on that activity and to create and sustain assorted critical processes of judgment, deliberation, and evaluation to keep that activity viable in a world of many other possible interests and concerns.

Given the importance of social administration to the field of social service and to the profession of social work, it is genuinely surprising how many introductory social work texts and survey-introductions to the profession devote so little or no attention to its unique tasks. It is even more surprising how many social work management texts also begin with humble acceptance and elaborate acknowledgments for the rather tenuous and peripheral place of social administration at the indirect outer fringes of the social work curriculum.

As a teaching device this is understandable, even if it is not an accurate statement of practice reality. Professional training is in large part preparation for entry-level practice, and social administration is not an entry-level

concern. Although a great many MSWs may eventually make their way into administrative practice, most begin at the bottom. Indeed, this pattern of promotion up through the ranks is one of the most enduring characteristics of social agencies during the past seventy-five years.

Beginning practitioners should expect to only gradually become fully engaged with the particular issues and concerns of social administration that are the principal concerns of agency executives and the most senior, experienced staff members. However, there is currently no level of professional education available to those moving up in this manner at the time and place when they may need it most. This entry-level emphasis of social work education can easily create a distorted picture of real professional practice. In general, the concerns of social administration assume a far larger portion of professional energy and attention than the current entry-level concerns that the social work curriculum recognizes.

One of the perspectives in social work education that contributes to perpetuating this false picture of the role of social administration in the social agency is the conception of administration as a narrowly specialized enabling method or form of indirect practice.<sup>10</sup> The notion of administration as indirect practice has proved to be an extremely unfortunate and counterproductive one, carrying as it does possible implications of being circuitous, devious, roundabout, and perhaps even manipulative, dishonest, and misleading.<sup>11</sup> In more extreme forms, such claims may even go so far as to contrast social administration with real social work! Clearly, there is an important difference between working face-to-face with clients and working on budgets to enable such face-to-face encounters to occur. The difficulty is that there is no genuinely suitable term currently in widespread usage to express this difference. We believe that social administration as we have developed it offers such a substitute. But keep in mind that social administration is no less a form of practice than case work or group work. Like them, it is social work.

The whole notion of indirect practice confronts the reality of practice in the social agency exactly backward. Despite some movement toward independent private practice, social work practice is still predominantly agency practice, and agencies (including most schools of social work) are organized hierarchically. In such hierarchical contexts, there is no coherent reason to define the essential professional core of social work as uniquely centered only in the lowest level professional positions to the subordination or even partial exclusion of those at the upper levels. It is also contrary to any vision of a close relationship among social work, social agencies, and social services to suggest that those most responsible for the mission of social agencies are somehow indirectly or tangentially related to the mission of the profession. Social administration is not a supportive activity to enable

social work. It is the principal professional concern and activity of a substantial portion of the most senior members of the professional social work community and the pivotal force in agency-based practice.

To emphasize the centrality of social administration takes nothing away from the equally skilled and in many cases equally senior clinical professionals engaged in defining, modeling, and carrying out client service delivery. Nor does it necessarily represent a dismissal of the idea of indirect practice per se. Social planning, social work research, and social work education may be three genuine forms of indirect practice. To suggest that social administration is a similar activity, however, is in error. In matters of administrative justice, for example, social administrators must be as concerned with specific, individual clients as any caseworker. To suggest, however, that because social administrators must sometimes be concerned with large aggregates of clients they are not directly concerned with clients stretches the limits of both credulity and the language.

Much the same conclusion is suggested by the ordinary pattern of career progression in social work. In social work, as in most occupations, career progression is a matter of promotion from entry-level positions to positions of increasing responsibility and authority. To our knowledge in the entire history of the field, no one has ever been rewarded for successful social administration by promotion to an entry-level clinical position. In contrast, the research literature clearly documents that substantial numbers of clinicians move into administrative positions as promotions. It seems equally plausible that at least some social administrators move back into senior clinical positions at some point, but this matter has received little or no attention. The main point here is that social workers fought long and hard to attain a measure of professional standing. The notion that those victories would purposely be compromised by taking some of the most senior and experienced people out of the lines of authority and responsibility and directing them into indirect administrative and leadership positions is not reasonable.

In short, there is nothing at all indirect about social administration. Executives supervise and direct the work of supervisors who supervise and direct the work of workers who work face-to-face with clients. Each has different roles and responsibilities, but nowhere in that chain of authority and responsibility is it possible to identify a cusp or cut point where direct delegations of mission, authority, or responsibility become in any meaningful sense indirect. Indeed, to draw such a line would cut both ways. If upper-level administrators are only indirectly engaged in service delivery, then lower-level workers must also only indirectly be carrying out the mission of the agency and the purposes of the profession. Both views are nonsensical, and any indirect service conception of social administration deserves to be abandoned entirely.

## Social Administration as Management

*Management* is the term that applies to the first essential element of social administration practice that addresses the internal governance of an organization. Social administration strives to guide and enhance the operation of social services in part through use of the broad perspectives of general management and by selecting from the range of tools from the emergent disciplines that call themselves *management sciences*. Classic management science applied to social service embraces a number of interesting updates and approaches, explored more thoroughly in chapters 6 and 7.

Any consideration of management in the context of social work poses an interesting dilemma. Traditional approaches to administration in social work prior to 1970, such as those of Arthur Dunham (1947), Harleigh Trecker (1971), Sue Spencer (1970), John Kidneigh (1950), and Nathan Cohen (1957), constructed the topic of social work administration as an integral component of general social work while bootlegging in a rather motley assortment of management concepts. Unfortunately, adherents of this position were too few, and their writings reached too limited an audience within the profession to prove fully persuasive. This approach was downplayed and eventually abandoned by many because of the seeming inability to incorporate many of the technical advances of the contemporary management sciences into a rapidly changing body of knowledge. The 1970s were a decade of tremendous technical advances in social administration knowledge, and the label “human services management” became a banner held high by the advocates of those advances.

Beginning in the 1970s, and largely coinciding with the initial publication of the journal *Administration in Social Work*, a new management perspective in social administration began to evolve with greater ties to the main interdisciplinary body of management theory. At first largely centered on a concern for applications of organization theory to social work, more recently this has evolved into a full-bodied management perspective (Edwards, Yankey, & Altpeter, 1998; Ginsberg, 1995; Ginsberg & Keys, 1995; Sarri, 1971).

## Social Administration as Leadership

The second important dimension in social administration is the phenomenon of leadership (Perlmutter & Slavin, 1984–85). In some management science conceptions, administration *is* leadership. William H. Newman (1951) defined administration as “the guidance, leadership, and control of the efforts of a group of individuals toward some common goal.” In dealing with leadership, we are concerned with the full scope of the topic: board

leadership as well as policy leadership; community leadership as well as professional leadership; unit and departmental leadership by supervisors as well as executive leadership.

Leadership in the field of social services is inherently wrapped up in the activities and particular skills associated with social administration. This is true not only in professional circles but also in policy, identification of needs, innovation and creation of new services, and a thousand other venues. When the governor asks for a representative from social services for a task force on welfare reform, chances are that person will be a social administrator. When the press interviews for the “social service perspective” on a health care reform proposal, chances are they will interview an administrator. The Accreditation Commission and the Council on Social Work Education’s Board of Directors, which set the standards that this book was written to reflect, are composed predominantly of administrators. There are countless other examples showing that the people who decide critical questions about social work constitute the visible public leadership profile of the profession, and those most frequently held up as exemplars of the best in professional practice are disproportionately administrators.

Leadership in social work has always had a very strong social administrative connection. A majority of the officers and committee chairs of the Council on Social Work administration at any given time are likely to be administrators. They are deans and directors, undergraduate program directors, directors of field instruction, and the like. The same was true for early psychiatry. It was eighteenth and nineteenth century state hospital superintendents—not psychotherapists or pharmacologists—who formed the core of the psychiatric profession long before the term *mental health administrator* came into use.

Social administrators continue to make up a disproportionately large share of the day-to-day leadership of the social work profession, social agencies, and programs even as they continue to be an integral part of the profession. For example, in 1965, an anniversary symposium was held to celebrate the founding of NASW ten years earlier. Fifteen of the sixteen members of the planning committee for that event were either administrators or faculty members, as were forty-one of the forty-nine presenters at the conference (Alexander, 1965). This pattern of leadership has been repeated over and over again throughout the entire history of the profession.

### **Social Administration as Decision Making**

Beginning with the pioneering work of Herbert Simon (1947/1997) in the 1940s, the importance of decision making to administrative practice began

to be recognized. More recently, with advances in the strategic paradigm, such as strategic management and strategic planning, understanding of the central importance of critical decisions has also reached a new high in business management. Decision-making theory is important to social administration in part because of its integrative capacity. It brings together attention to the interplay of rational (economic), political (interactional), and socioemotional factors that affect decisions and their outcomes.

The decision-making perspective is also important in social administration because it offers two additional ways to link social administration into the main body of social work theory and practice. Administrative decision making and generalist social work share an underlying perspective in problem solving. The more important, indeed overriding, reason is because of the manner in which a concern for the most important, key, or critical decisions in social services offers the strongest point at which to tie the social work profession and social administration together. It simply makes no sense whatsoever to develop a professional infrastructure in which the key decisions are by design left to outsiders.

In the 1940s, political scientist and later cognitive scientist Herbert Simon (1947/1997) focused attention on the importance of decisions. Since then, decision-making theory has gone in two highly divergent directions that are extremely difficult to apply directly to general perspectives on social administration but that are nonetheless important to keep in mind. One of these is rational choice theory, in which decisions are approached largely within the rubrics of microeconomics and analytical philosophy. This approach, referred to variously as *rationalism* and the *synoptic approach*, has as its essential feature a largely futile quest for certainty often referred to in terms of replacing decisions based on politics with scientific, rational, or objective decisions. The rational choice approach to decisions often moves in very mathematical directions and is the basis for most economic approaches to administration.

The second direction is a less technical and more interactional concern for the strategic importance of key decisions found woven throughout the writings of journalists, political commentators, political scientists, historians, sociologists, and others. In general, much of this work is informed by recognition of the importance of uncertainty as a condition of all administrative decision making and the tradeoffs between evidence and opinion that must be part of every real-life decision.

One of the key terms that occurs repeatedly throughout this book arises from the incremental decision-making perspective originated by Simon, Charles Lindblom (1957, 1979), and others. This is the idea of strategy. The term *strategy* usually refers to an active orientation toward the environment

of an organization or community and also to a deliberateness and reflectiveness that transcends simpler, ad hoc problem-solving responses to issues and problems arising in the environment.

### **Social Administration as Institution Building**

A full understanding of our topic requires that we consider also the role of social administration in building and promoting social welfare institutions. After several decades of primary preoccupation with behavioral concerns and considerations, organization researchers have begun to return to a concern with the institutional level of organizations (Scott, 1995). This is fortunate. One of the misadventures of the influence of studies of organizational behavior on social administration was the mistaken advancement of an ultraconservative image of the manager as institutional conserver. This view, put forth as the "maintenance perspective," suggested that the manager was the self-interested protector of organizational turf, interested primarily either in building empires or in creating a safe and comfortable work environment that avoided risk taking at all costs. Although studies have often found that such people do exist in social service and other organizations, such behavior is hardly deserving of the label professional or worthy of emulating under any label.

In our experience, the actual practice of social administration is equally well populated with risk takers on a mission. These persons are institution builders and less interested in building personal fiefs than in establishing, building, maintaining, and expanding viable programs and services that make real differences in clients' lives. The notion that social administrators generally seek only to serve their own career and economic interests is a false and misleading one that deserves the scorn of professionals everywhere.

When people have in mind considerations such as "serving the community" and "advancing the social work profession," it is generally institution building and not the simple pursuit of individual and organizational self-interest that is uppermost in their minds. Some of the studies of organizations notwithstanding, no very strong normative case can be made for the view that professions *should* exist merely as organized fronts for the pursuit of empire building and personal aggrandizement by their members. Any profession that seeks advancement purely on such grounds is likely in the long run to succumb to its own cynicism. However, any profession that does not pay careful and continuous attention to building and maintaining the institutions within which it may flourish is giving up an important measure of self-control and self-direction. For a profession such as social work,



which is barely a century old, to ignore issues of institutionalization is virtually to ensure that its existence may be a short one.

## CONCLUSION

Social administration as it is articulated in this book may well be the highest form of social work practice. It is a form of practice in which one not only does professional social work but enables others to do social work at the same time. Effective social administration requires highly advanced and sophisticated practice skills. It incorporates the broadest possible range of practice skills and knowledge. This positioning of social administration embraces and sheds light upon the most complete history of the social work profession and not merely upon the enthusiasms of most recent decades. In addition, it matches the existing reward structure within the profession, within human service organizations, and in society.

The best approach to social administration is to see it as the epitome of advanced practice in social work and not as a peripheral afterthought or indirect practice. However, with this position also go major obligations. Because of its importance to the profession and to social services, social administration must remain thoroughly integrated into the values and ethics of the profession. Insistence on a handmaiden role for administration and the continued loss of social administration positions to those without social work training are merely two sides of the same coin. What is needed in the longer view is an approach to administration that is both process oriented and deeply grounded in the ethics and values of the profession. The epitome of the organizational and community leadership exercised by social administrators is the type of behavior that Manning (1997) termed *moral citizenship*: "The responsibility to determine right and good behavior as part of the rights and privileges social workers have as members of a community that includes clients, colleagues, agencies and society" (p. 24). Throughout the book, we explore aspects of such a perspective.

We live in an administered world, and administration/management is one of the fundamental determining factors in the world today. Nowhere is this any more true than in the nature and direction of the social services. In addition, the core of what we might call the administrative paradigm is relatively simple and straightforward, built around a few basic concepts of decision making, leadership, and organization. Following through on the full practice implications of these seemingly simple ideas, however, can be the professional journey of a lifetime.

And so, let the journey begin.

