

Concluding Reflections

As I suggested above, the capacity to think intelligently about issues in adult and organizational learning seems to have accelerated impressively since Wilensky's (1967) review of the field 13 years ago. Perhaps the field, at least as indexed by increasingly differentiated diagnoses and partially integrated appraisals of all the elements and processes involved, is accelerating up the takeoff path of the logarithmic S curve beloved to some developmental theorists. However, the criterion for full integration remains unmet (and may require further self-reflection - a formal integration on the model of a Bach fugue may be inappropriate if political life in America actually has the character of a Bartok composition, a Thelonious Monk jazz ensemble, or even the modern music of John Cage). Moreover, the second criterion for learning I have proposed - greater effectiveness produced from using such a wealth of theories - has still to be demonstrated.

Researchers in this field will have their own agendas, but I want to flag seven problems where it seems the issues are clear enough, the basic research technologies available, and the likely impact from good research and creative thought sufficiently strong to warrant special attention.

The Design of Institutional-Memory Capabilities

The fact must now be faced, I am afraid, that academic social science in the United States, since it is tied to student enrollment, has peaked and is unlikely to increase for the next several generations. And there is just too much unknown for academic social science to take the responsibility on itself for codifying and learning from all relevant experience of all government agencies. The key will be to help design the codification and retrieval systems that agencies themselves can implement and to train the generation of researchers who will staff them and build greater analytic behavioral theory.

Increasing Effective Transitions and Competence of Political Appointees

It is widely agreed in Washington that it takes one to two years for most political appointees to learn their jobs, except perhaps in the foreign-policy area where the Council on Foreign Relations provides upcoming elites with prior exposure and experience. A variety of institutional innovations are possible, although they probably need to be initiated independently of government (such as, e.g., Johnson Foundation Health Staff Seminars) and could probably be aided by more knowledge of how well shadow cabinet systems operate to provide effective transitions.

Quality of Watchdog and Critic Systems

If I had to place a bet on the validity of only one policy-relevant theory of learning, it would be Will this be on an exam? Until there are institutions and practices to hold the executive branch accountable for its long-term learning, performance will fall short of capacity. And the bottom line is that if you have anything new to learn that will help you become more effective, you won't learn it from people who already think you're completely right. Expanded congressional staffs, and especially increased critical capabilities by the General Accounting Office, are improving the intelligence of criticism, but probably a useful innovation would be to require regular reports to Congress on long-run learning agendas and on results in selected programs or problems that would be subjects of public hearings. For example, reports by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare every three years on what HEW has been learning about program implementation or education achievement, or from the Justice Department on criminal rehabilitation, or from the State Department on terrorism, could be instituted as routine. It is also possible that a three-year evaluation plan, developed in consultation between committee staff and agency officials and subject to a full-dress congressional hearing, could be a routine requirement for every program (see Aberbach, 1979).

A related problem is developing accountability for the intelligence, sophistication, and long-term learning agendas of the news media, particularly of the key 500 to 1,000 top journalists in the country. One problem is whether they have adequate funding for independent research and evaluation to sharpen their own explanatory and diagnostic capabilities.

Dependency Theory of Motivational Blockage

A critical issue is the development and testing of dependency theory approaches to life in hierarchical bureaucracies (see above). Merton's (1952) classic attack on the Weberian theory that large hierarchical organizations make people rational and responsible seems capable of being pressed much further, especially on dissociation of personal responsibility, restricted personal identity, increased inertia and fear of change, ritualization and other symptoms of primary process shifts, dependent complaining, reactivity, hierarchical imagery context embeddedness, and so forth. As well, there is the issue of whether free-riding, dependency, and dependent complaining strategies are rational and effective (Hirschman, 1970; Olson, 1965; Schelling, 1978).

Good Judgment

Plato's concern (see above, p. 33) to facilitate the development of people who can be trusted to have good judgment on important issues remains alive today. It is likely that in any field there are people with reputations for particularly sound advice and perspective, but within the wide array of decision-making studies, injunctions, and technical analytical aids, the problem of who makes good decisions has yet to be addressed.

Overload and How to Cope

There is a simple mathematics of overload: if 50 scientists in a field each publish one paper a year, each scientist has only to read 49 papers to stay current and continue working.

If there are 1,000 scientists in a field and each publishes one paper a year, the system can start to overload, self-absorb, self-dampen, and reduce individual productivity because each individual now faces 999 relevant papers to read. (People cope in various ways, but it has been alleged that even now the typical academic social scientist has time to read thoughtfully only about 20% of the books in his or her office.) Government officials face a similar time and capacity problem: there is a simple mathematics of a growing bureaucracy or government overloading and self-absorbing itself merely in maintenance and survival functions. By the end of the 1980s, if current practices continue, there will still be the same limited number of top-level people in the executive branch and Congress, most of them newcomers to their jobs, trying to manage massive agencies, survive, and accomplish something within a partially chaotic domestic and international political process. And, to be sure, their environment will not always be filled with mutual support and good will. They will be held responsible to solve and set policy directions on (literally) every important problem in the world. Perhaps some may even want to do a responsible job of planning and overseeing over \$1 trillion in annual outlays, spending 25% of our GNP (and with an extremely important role in some areas, such as health care, defense, and education, much more than this 25% average). There is probably considerable knowledge about how to help people run these processes successfully that needs to be made available, and thinking about the research agendas to produce it would have high potential yield (with such annual outlays, a 1% increase in effectiveness or efficiency would yield \$10 billion in the first year alone, and that means a massive benefit/cost ratio that could justify extraordinary increases in research funding).

The Critique of Ideology and Overconfidence

Ideology still plays a significant role in decisions and, to the extent that the relevant assumptions can be explicated and tested and the empirical results diffused, there is

probably a major potential to increase realistic problem solving (Edelman, 1977; Etheredge, 1976a). (To take one minor example, research on welfare recipients seems to have reduced, over the past 25 years, the harshness of conservative virulence about bums, cheats, and rip-off artists by simply differentiating and counting types of people, such as mothers with small children, who apply.) And the development of a professional and medical diagnostic capability for social problems will probably also be increased by related efforts to more reliably calibrate ignorance levels given the direct evidence (cited earlier) that many people in Washington overestimate how much they already know and mistake simple intuitive plausibility for true understanding.

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The memories and intelligence of institutions and societies are only partly in libraries; they live as well in the qualities of mind developed by scholars and passed by their personal example to their students - to the extent that there is, at times, alert and discerning intelligence in these pages, the reader will be detecting the effects not only of works cited in the bibliography, but also the touch of Robert Lane and the late Harold Lasswell. To many others, including colleagues and interview subjects in Washington, I extend my

thanks.