Reputation and Public Administration

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Reputation and Public Administration[1]

Daniel Carpenter[2] and George Krause[3]

In democratic settings, public administration cannot operate in an organizational vacuum.
This is because government agencies both make and administer public policies in a richly
textured political environment comprised of diverse audiences, including elected officials,
clientele groups, the media, policy experts, and ordinary citizens. Naturally, public
administrators confront three primary challenges that are fundamental to governance: (1) how to
maintain broad-based support for an agency and its activities, (2) how to steer a vessel amid

[2] Allie S. Freed Professor of Government, Harvard University, and Visiting Researcher, L'Institut
d'Études Politiques, Université de Strasbourg.

[3] Professor of Political Science, University of Pittsburgh.

hazardous shoals (enemies and potentially disaffected supporters), and (3) how to project a judicious combination of consistency and flexibility. Public administrators' capacity for handling these administrative challenges rests heavily upon its organizational reputation.

We define organizational reputation as a set of beliefs about an organization that pertains to its capacities, intentions, history, and mission, where the beliefs are embedded in a network of multiple audiences (Carpenter 2010a: 33). Unfortunately, organizational reputations almost always fail to provide bureaucratic agencies with a simple or easy strategy that simultaneously solves all three types of obstacles to effective governance. In any organization worth its name, the vessel is actually a flotilla, never easily moving in unison. The management of organizational image among multiple constituencies is necessary work in which full success is an impossibility. Yet public administrators at all levels of an organization spend much of their time attempting to cultivate a reputation that will not only allow them to accrue autonomy (Carpenter 2001; Rourke 1984; Wilson 1989), but also offer a protective shield in the presence of opposition in the form of hostile external audiences (Hood 2011).

In this essay, we assert that understanding how organizational reputations are formed, and subsequently cultivated, is fundamental to understanding the role of public administration in a democracy. This line of argument presupposes that various audience members' behavior towards government agencies is a function of their beliefs regarding what tasks government agencies can and cannot effectively perform. Although organizational reputations are characterized by beliefs held by external audience members (e.g., elected officials, clientele groups, the media, policy experts, and ordinary citizens), the latter are also endogenously developed by the internal character of the administrative organization in terms of mission and solidarity. For instance, the literature on public service motivation (PSM) has offered

compelling empirical evidence that agency personnel are more likely to be motivated to the greater good of the agency (and public service, in general) when they exhibit strong organizational commitment or identity (Romzek 1990), the intrinsic value of the agency's mission is deemed worthwhile (Wright 2007; Wright and Pandey 2008), can operate in administrative environment that encourages strong professional norms, coupled with creating an environment with clear hierarchical lines of authority and internal procedures that empower personnel (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). Accordingly, the aim of this essay is to focus on both the external and internal character of organizational reputations applied to the study of administrative agencies. We begin by discussing the nature of organizational reputations in public administration.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATIONS

The reputation-based study of administration embeds insights from the earliest writings of public administration. These include the classic texts of Simon, Smithburg and Thompson (1991: 189, 348) and of Herbert Kaufman (1981: 10, 26, 76, 131, 145, 164, 173). In his widely cited treatise *Bureaucracy: what Government Agencies Do and How they Do It*, James Q. Wilson discusses reputations repeatedly without focusing upon them or theorizing them (1989: 46, 74, 77, 80-81, 97, 120, 182, 190, 191, 197, 199, 205, 209, 222, 252, 317).[4] Hence as a set of focused academic writings, the reputation-centered account of administration and administrative politics is relatively in its infancy. Reputation and administration comprise an emerging

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[4] The closest that James Q. Wilson comes to advancing theoretical nuggets of wisdom on reputation is in his statements on the importance of reputations for public executives: "Reputation – for influence, style and access – is a key part of the relationship between executive and constituency." (Wilson 1989: 205).

synthesis, we will claim, because we are approaching the point where there is enough work

related to these concepts, themes and theories to glean some general principles and 'stylized

facts'. In turn, this can offer sound guidance for future research seeking to understand how

organizational reputations affect the conduct of public administration.

An organizational reputation is a multi-faceted concept that is comprised of a set of

beliefs about an organization that pertains to its capacities, intentions, history, and mission that is

embedded in a network of multiple audiences (Carpenter 2010a: 33). Carpenter (2010a: Chapter

1) highlights four critical facets (or dimensions) of an agency's reputation that will shape its

audience's reactions and the associated behavior of its members and officials. Simply and

bluntly put, these forms of reputation can be considered as responses to very simple questions.

- *Performative reputation*: Can the agency do the job? Can it execute charges upon its
  responsibility in a manner that is interpreted as competent and perhaps efficient?
- *Moral reputation* – Is the agency compassionate, flexible, and honest? Does it protect the
  interests of its clients, constituencies, and members?
- *Procedural reputation* – Does the agency follow normally accepted rules, however
  good/bad its decisions?
- *Technical reputation* – Does agency have the capacity and skill required for dealing in
  complex environments, independent of and separate from its actual performance?

A critical feature of these dimensions of any single organizations reputation is that they neither

stay nor move in harmony. The effect of preserving, enhancing or even "maximizing" one

dimension implies that another dimension will likely suffer, rendering a full "optimization"

among the various dimensions as being infeasible in practical terms. Therefore, agencies must choose to select which reputational dimensions receive priority, and those which do not. An agency thus engaged in highly specialized, technical tasks (e.g., NASA) will place the greatest premium on its technical reputation. Moreover, administrative agencies may emphasize these different dimensions of organizational reputation based on the differentiability of its subunits' task activities. For example, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), one would expect that the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) bureau will view its moral reputation as being of paramount importance in administering policies pertaining to child abuse & neglect and human trafficking; whereas the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) should be relatively more concerned about its procedural reputation for following guidelines for administering health care benefits and disbursements in both a fair and legal manner. Yet, cultivating a favorable organizational reputation on even a single dimension can be quite challenging given the multiple audiences that administrative agencies must address. We turn our attention to this topic in the next section.

ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATIONS IN THE PRESENCE OF MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

The animating concept of a reputation-based account of public agencies is that of audience. A critical argument of the perspective is that public managers are by necessity and training acutely aware of their audiences, and that their audiences monitor them. Not all audiences have the same effect, but at least some of them (more than one) are being watched explicitly and implicitly by public administrators for purposes of accurately gauging expectations regarding external demands placed upon them. A second critical fact is that what audiences see

is not the perfectly tuned or visible reality of the agency, but an image that embeds considerable uncertainty and ambiguity (Gioia, Schultz and Corley 2000). Complex public organizations are seen "through a glass but dimly" by their manifold audiences.

If features of an agency are not fully known, and if one function of a reputation is to stand in for these features, one might wonder why the work of reputation-centered theories cannot be simply understood in terms of signaling behavior commonplace in modern microeconomics. Why not model agency reputation as the kind of reputation that emerges in the incentives of a large chain store to snuff out competition at first sight? Why can't the reputation of an agency simply be understood in terms of a single quality signal to the legislature or the people *writ large*?

The reason is that public administration is a good deal more complicated than the simple reputational and signaling games common to formal theories of bureaucracy would suggest. These theories and models can be highly useful for particular types of puzzles, but they fail to capture some essential elements of reputations and audiences as they are experienced in the realm of public administration. To begin with, the audiences are multiple and diverse, so satisfying one audience (e.g., a congressional committee) often means perturbing another (e.g., the media). More powerfully, the complexity of public agencies means that there is not, as in the signaling games of formal theory, a single underlying "type" that characterizes the agency's values, preferences, intentions and resolve.

To better convey the joint challenges of 'multiplicity', 'diversity', and 'complexity' surrounding the relationship between audience members and organizational reputation in the public sphere, we offer an illuminating historical case study offered by the eminent historian Richard White. In *The Middle Ground*, White (1992) shows how the French crown managed its

relations with Algonquian Indians in the Great Lakes region in the 17th and 18th centuries using a web of Jesuits (sent by the French crown to conduct diplomacy with the Indians and keep their souls from falling into the hands of Protestant missionaries sent by the British and the Dutch); traders who procured furs and other natural resources that would become a critical source of revenue for the French Crown; couriers and sailors transporting merchandise and fish; and royal officials from Quebec. While all parties acted on the official authority or charter of the French Crown, all of them made different promises and projections. Yet even while the middle ground lasted, it was shot through, indeed sustained by, what you might call equilibrium misunderstandings. The French Jesuits introduced the Indians to Christ as the ultimate god, but the Indians were accepting Jesus as just another Manitou, an animal spirit. When a Frenchman was murdered by some young warriors from one village, the two sides saw to it that the punishment meted out fit both with Native American notions of justice ("covering the dead" by the giving of presents from the family of the killer to the family of the deceased) and the European/Christian notion of justice as demanding an arrest and a trial. Europeans and Indians saw no reason to think more deeply about these arrangements as long as some basic satisficing criteria (the stability of the alliance, beneficial cultural and economic exchange for both sides) were met.

The middle ground of the Great Lakes region some three centuries ago forms but a metaphor for understanding the relationship between an organizational reputation and its multiple audiences. Specifically, this metaphor underscores the reality that administrators of the French Crown (and the Jesuits and traders themselves, as extensions of the French empire, could be lumped into that category) faced. Multiple agents can represent the organization (the Crown)

to a set of multiple audiences (the various Indian villages and linguistic groups).[5] The reputation of one's organization (one's tribe, or on the other side, the Crown) is always in jeopardy and never fully clear. Negotiations were never committal for the long term and were couched in unavoidable and strategic ambiguity. Reputations were powerful, at times, precisely because they were ill-defined. Yet in a complex chaotic world they were, and remain now, necessary for feasible mutual understanding.

Wrestling with this kind of ambiguity in the face of pluralistic interests makes establishing a salutary organizational reputation all the more difficult. Research from an organizational sociological perspective makes this very point. Although the classic account of multiple audiences advanced by Erving Goffmann has inspired a generation or more of scholars in organizational identity (Hatch and Schultz 2004), the application of this perspective to public bureaucracies has lagged considerably in terms of its intellectual development. This is unfortunate given that it is quite plausible that the complex, high-velocity arena of administrative politics provides the very case that management and organization scholars should least delay in studying. So too, the reputation of public organizations is bound up with the legitimacy of the state (Carpenter 2001; Moynihan and Ingraham 2010; Skowronek 1982) in ways that few sociological and management-based accounts have examined.

In a parallel vein, political scientists Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwarz (1984) have long argued that external groups can act as "fire alarms" to alert politicians and other agency overseers of actions that concern or bother them. While these accounts usefully place

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[5] One customarily thinks of uncertainty as the lack of information regarding an object; yet the differentiation of public agencies, like the differentiation of the Great Lakes region, suggests that uncertainty may arise from the surplus of information about so many officials and their potential actions.

emphasis upon the set of actors observing a public agency, they focus only on what these audiences convey to politicians and elective institutions. There is insufficient realization in these studies that public administrators and agencies will court the very audiences (i.e., clientele groups) that might pull the 'fire alarms', and thus is should not come as a surprise that theseaudiences may find their fealty as much or more with the agency as with its elected overseers (Carpenter 2001, Chapter 9).[6]

THE ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATIONS OF PUBLIC AGENCIES: LAYING OUT THE 'STYLIZED FACTS'

The need for a reputation-centered account of public administration is not the need for an all-encompassing approach but the need for scholars and practitioners to examine the image considerations that buffet any public agency and its administrators. We begin with a set of basic stylized facts about public agencies that are known to be true, yet existing theories are poorly equipped to handle.

■ *Public agencies are differentiated, more so than other recipients of delegated political authority and power.* There are dozens or hundreds of members in any legislature, but they often share common institutional characteristics: chosen according the same laws of election, endowed with similar though not identical powers. They meet together in the same physical

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[6] It is important to understand that, although reputation has been linked to bureaucratic autonomy, there is not in fact a necessary relationship between the two concepts (Roberts 2006). An analysis of autonomy need not involve an analysis of agency reputation, and vice-versa.

spaces, are lobbied by the same set of actors, and vote on identical propositions. Agencies are composed not only of the operators, middle managers and executives that James Q. Wilson (1988) identified. Each of these categories is more highly differentiated , as "staff" are composed of differentiated functionaries or specialists (in an environmental regulatory agency, for one example, chemists, toxicologists, statisticians, attorneys, human resources and public management specialists; in a child welfare agency, for another example, case workers, social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists, nutrition specialists, legal officers and attorneys).   This differentiation means that agencies are harder to characterize, which means (counterintuitively but powerfully) that agency reputation is all the more important because organizational images offer forceful simplifications of more complicated agency realities, and they are often relied upon more heavily when the agency itself is more complicated.

- *Not everyone in a public agency is on the same page.* (This will be obvious to students of business administration and public administration.) It is a common feature of complex organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors that the information, assumptions, resources and intentions of some agents are partially or wholly concealed from others. This concealment can be intentional or unintentional, yet the result is the same: the left hand rarely knows well what the right hand is doing. This fact replicates in part the centrifugal forces of administration that Simon (1956) and Kaufman (1967) emphasize, and it has been nicely summarized in Frederickson's (1999) term "the disarticulated state." Complex public organizations and networks must decentralize authority and operation, and whether it is geographic or specialization based upon a span of control, the decentralization multiplies the

opportunities for differential action. Yet the differentiation is also professional and political. Professionally, some officials in public organizations speak one language while others speak a different tongue. Politically, coalitions emerge within and across organizations. They emerge in support of or opposition to certain rules, policies and personalities, and this everyday "office politics" can further multiply differentiation.

■ *External audience members view public agencies as being more unified than they actually are.* Alternatively stated, organizational reputations attach themselves to entities whose members and parts are so disparate that it is impossible for all or even most of them to be culpable or praiseworthy for the actions that give rise to the image in the first place (Carpenter 2010a). Even though it is fashionable to treat public administration and public management as a networked process rather than as a bureaucratized process (Frederickson 1999; O'Toole 1997), the cultural, political and social reality of organizational image remains. Even if the actual network of agents delivering public services is manifold and complex, observers and audiences will nonetheless make inferences and judgments – judgments that are culturally, economically, politically, and socially consequential – about what they and others perceive as unified entities responsible for outcomes. Despite the reality that organizations such as the FBI, the Forest Service, the FDA, the U.S. Marines, Microsoft and Sony Corporations, or the Roman Catholic Church are not perfectly unified entities, their observers in the public and private speak as if they were unified entities all the time, and without thinking twice about it. This fact gives rise to "bad apple effects" that occur when the malfeasance of one agent within (or affiliated with) an organization spreads a bad reputation to others. (A corollary of this is the "least common denominator effect" of

reputation, whereby sometimes an organization's reputation will be shaped or even defined by the single worst outcome or agent ascribable to it).

■ *Public agencies often treat as irreversible those decisions that can, legally or technologically, be reversed.* Examples include product approval decisions (Carpenter 2002, 2004), public announcements and warnings (Maor 2011), the issuance of new rules and scientific determinations, behavior around agency jurisdictions (Maor 2010) and others. Reputation dynamics do not always induce agencies to cling to past choices or rulings – there may be strong audience incentives for revising decisions. Yet the projection of consistency should not be underestimated as a force shaping agency choice.

■ *Public agencies engage in "contingent actions" as a means of hedging against either policy or technical uncertainty.* That is, organizations will actively attempt to keep their options open in order to remain flexible, and thus avoid falling prey to the pathologies of path-dependent decision-making. For example, Carpenter (2010a) and Carpenter and Moore (2007) demonstrate that public agencies may avoid making concrete predictions or commitments in some cases, trying to avoid commitment to a hypothesis that can be publicly falsified or to preserve space for future action.

■ *Agencies may emulate the actions and structures of others as a way of insulating themselves from criticism by audience members.* In organizational sociology, this legitimation perspective has powerfully explained the persistence and uniformity of many structural arrangements (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Yet reputation-based emulation has also been

observed in both U.S. economic and fiscal forecasting behavior (Krause and Douglas 2005, 2006; cf. Krause and Corder 2007), as well as in the realm of administration of U.S. federal public lands (Kunioka and Rothenberg 1993), as a means of blame avoidance. The rationale for such behavior among agencies engaged in the same set of functional tasks is the desire for organizational maintenance (see also Wilson 1989; cf. Downs 1967).

■ *Agencies have multiple audiences; therefore satisfying some audience subset often means upsetting others or projecting ambiguity.* The public administrator who serves multiple publics must often chart a course of action that is responsive to several of them at once; this may mean -- appropriately for responsive, democratic and accountable management -- speaking or presenting intentions in ways that refrain from (a) committing to a specific interpretation, (b) favoring one audience over another, (c) privileging or insulting one audience relative to another, or (d) committing forcibly to a future course of action. This acknowledgement and theorization of multiple audiences stands as one of the central factors differentiating reputation-based theories in public administration from closely related, but different, "blame game" and "blame avoidance" theories (e.g., Hood 2010). While blame avoidance has become an important tool for theory and empirical explanation, and for public administration policy initiative and reform, theoretical and empirical studies in the "blame avoidance" literature remain, at present, insufficiently attentive to the multiple audiences, multiple constituencies and multiple publics of agencies. In fact, what may look like blame avoidance in some public administration contexts (Hood 2010, chapter 7) may in fact represent a strategy of negotiating among multiple audiences.

The preceding list of empirical patterns of "stylized facts" does not apply to all public agencies. Yet it applies to many (perhaps most) of them. Many of these patterns apply not only to the agencies in whose context they have been intensively studied such as postal policy (Carpenter 2000), pharmaceutical regulation (Carpenter 2010), budgetary and economic forecasting (Krause and Douglas 2005), but also in new areas such as intelligence administration (JPH manuscript) and financial enforcement by central bank agencies (Carpenter 2010b).

Because understanding the cultivation and subsequent maintenance of an organizational reputation is highly complex due to its many moving parts, we limit the remainder of our attention to one particular manifestation: the accrual of administrative discretion, or even autonomy, vis-à-vis elected officials. This topic is not only elemental to modern political science research concerned with democratic governance in the administrative state, but it is also foundational to understanding the normative tension between politics and administration in democratic societies (Wilson 1887; Goodnow 1900; Appleby 1949; Long 1952).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF AGENCY REPUTATION

Although some claim that reputation is a limited and unstable basis for autonomy (Roberts 2006), reputation-based arguments have made significant contributions to understanding public agencies' relationships with their elective and judicial overseers. Examining the history of three executive departments from the Civil War period to the cusp of the New Deal, Carpenter (2001) argued that two departments' reputations (those of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Post Office Department) gave these organizations significant autonomy in the sense of being able to sway the wishes of elected officials on particular matters

of policy, and in the sense of being able to secure deference from these elected officials.

Another agency that had a statutory basis for autonomy – the Reclamation Service of the U.S.

Department of Interior – did not experience political autonomy because of its poor reputation

among multiple audiences. McDonald and Franko (2007) demonstrate strong empirical evidence

in favor of the reputation-discretion relationship by showing evidence that high agency grades in

the Federal Performance Project (FPP) are inversely related to legislators' willingness to adopt

limitation riders as a mechanism to rein in administrative discretion. The evidence from this

study, coupled with MacDonald (2010), offers the first consistent set of large-N cross-agency

evidence that an agency's general reputation has a salutary impact on its levels of discretion.

In the past decade, several articles have extended the reputational logic to examine

agency behavior. Using agency output measures comprised of identical tasks, Krause and

Douglas (2005) find that fiscal and economic forecasts made by the Office of Management and

Budget (located in the executive branch), the Congressional Budget Office (located in the

legislative branch) and the Federal Reserve (an independent commission) produce similar results.

Because each agency experiences similar reputation costs for providing inferior forecasts, they

have a strong incentive to emulate one another's task performance for purposes of organizational

maintenance (Krause and Douglas 2006). However, when these reputation costs are discounted

in a differential manner across agencies, task performance may vary in ways that can be

mistakenly attributed to variations in political insulation. For instance, while the OMB and SSA

economic projections are quite similar in the current fiscal period, they begin to diverge as SSA

places a greater premium on its reputation for policy expertise over the long-haul vis-à-vis OMB

by offering more conservative policy forecasts (Krause and Corder 2007).

In a study of the timing of new drug approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Carpenter (2002) brings two reputation-based arguments to bear. First, he argues that an agency with a reputation for consumer protection would approach the approval of product as irreversible, despite the possibility of legal removal. The intuition behind this argument is that the reputational damage from an approved product gone bad cannot be undone by withdrawing it from the market; indeed, the act of product withdrawal may further publicize the agency's error. This reputational incentive serves as the basis for a dynamic stochastic model of optimal product approval (see also Carpenter 2004 for a generalized version). In this model, reputational irreversibility serves to create an uncertainty premium that makes approval slower in the first place, as the agency seeks to buttress its decision with additional information to compensate for the irreversibility. Second, Carpenter argues that various constituencies, mobilized partially by the benefits of the product, can place reputational costs upon the agency by engaging in public criticism or by weakening the agency's reputation on other dimensions (flexibility, compassion). Examining a sample of drug review times in a parametric duration model, Carpenter adduces evidence consistent with these hypotheses. Controlling for a range of epidemiological factors, drug review times were significantly quicker when the disease treated by the drug was more commonly covered in national newspapers.

Agency reputation, then, shapes administrative discretion and bureaucratic autonomy, while also shaping administrative choice. Perhaps the place to turn next is to the sort of cases and narratives that inspired Max Weber himself when constructing his classic portrait of bureaucracy: the modern, rationalized military organization. Students of the U.S. military have observed that social and political deference to professional military officers was not a pronounced feature of American politics until the twentieth century. This fact created a niche in

which political generals and appointed officers could operate during the Civil War, and it created

a politics of differentiation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the military

politics of the nineteenth-century British Empire, the durable and positive reputation of the

regimental system – a set of semi-autonomous units governed by a Commanding Officer – was

responsible for considerable discretion enjoyed by commanders. That discretion, as it turned out,

led to a much more decentralized British Army in the twentieth century than would otherwise

have been the case (French 2005). In the Meiji period of Japan (1868-1926), Imperial naval

officers engaged directly in national appeals and party politics, selling the uniqueness of the

Navy's contributions vis-à-vis the Japanese army (which had traditionally dominated Japanese

military politics, especially in the nineteenth century (Schenking 2005). The successful forging

of an organizational reputation – which as historians have noted was in many respects a

distinctively political act – resulted in the building of independent and durable organizational

naval power in Japan. Reputation in these accounts emerges as something of an historical force

associated with increasing delegation of power and authority to high military officers, and the

increasing willingness of American politicians to defer to military brass in matters of national

security, procurement, and others. Thomas Goss' discussion of the acceptance in American

society of military professionalism is exemplary here: "It was not enough for military officers to

declare themselves professionals; society must grant professional status and autonomy to those it

acknowledges as the experts in a given occupation. In spite of all the efforts of military

reformers, this acknowledgement did not happen until long after the end of Civil War" (Goss

2003; 202-203; see also 199-200). Yet, an enduring theme of organizational reputation that

emerges in these narratives of modern military bureaucracy is that of differentiation and the

difficulty of projecting a unified image or "face" (Goffmann's term). There is no one military

organization, and in fact there are different military organizations that implicitly and explicitly compete for claims to status and the right to perform certain tasks. More broadly, the politics of reputation amounts to a competition among smaller units in an organization for resources, tasks, and status. As a result, public agencies are often fragmented from within even if their external audiences view them as being a monolithic entity.

CONCLUSION

A critical feature of moving forward in this research is to not only examine the various dimensions of reputation, but to also assess their persistence and variability within and across administrative contexts. If reputation is reduced to simply a binary or monotonic choice or outcome pertaining to what a public agency has or does not have, or that an agency has "more" or "less" of, much of the richness of administrative behavior will be lost to the analyst. Examining the dimensions of Carpenter's (2010a) ideas of reputation – performative, technical, legal/procedural and moral – is one feasible strategy of continuing scholarship. Maor's study of comparative safety warnings across pharmaceutical markets offers another possibility of examining differing dimensions of reputation. Still another aspect is to explore how reputational considerations affect administrative behavior in the presence of functional rival agencies engaged in the same set of tasks, yet confronting different institutional incentives and organizational environments (Krause and Corder 2007; Krause and Douglas 2005, 2006).

There is a seductive but false hypothesis available, namely that as modern information technology better discloses information about agency operations (about everything, really), the marginal effect of "reputation" as opposed to "facts" will decline. As we get better information, this thinking goes, the influence of reputation will go away. As more and more is transparent

about these organizations, as more and more is publicized and as information and search costs get lower and lower, reputation won't matter anymore because we all know the true state of the world. Even under this type of quasi-rational, abundant information policymaking environment, we remain highly skeptical of claims regarding the demise of organizational reputations as a catalyst for understanding public administration. This is because the overflow of information brought on by technological advances and 'sunshine' procedures will result in modern citizens and societies having to wrestle with the dilemma of information overload. As a means of coping with the dilemma of abundant information in the presence of innate cognitive limitations, audience members will continue to rely on heuristics, or information shortcuts, intended to make understanding and inference regarding agency behavior much akin to how voters make evaluations regarding candidates for elective office.

Put simply, when it comes to complex public organizations and their manifold audiences, it is not too far a stretch to conclude that "beliefs are all we have." Audiences simplify the aggregated functions and behaviors of the public agencies that they observe. Agency reputations are part and parcel of both the empirical reality and scholarly analysis of public administration. An approach centered upon reputations – their complex reality and the range of behavioral and strategic tacks they induce on the part of public officials – offers a powerful explanation for a range of behaviors and institutional patterns that have previously escaped notice or eluded well-grounded explanation. Organizational reputation has been incorporated into historical, formal and empirical analyses of public administration, and while the paradigm does not offer an all-encompassing theoretical superstructure for public administration (we doubt that any single such structure exists), it forms a useful and likely durable framework for scholarship on public

administration that can offer a fruitful mechanism for understanding the confluence between the

best research in the public management and political science traditions, respectively.

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