

A CASE STUDY | The Critical Importance of Administrative Doctrine

All organizations are guided by a doctrine of management that reflects basic values. Doctrines and values may be stated or unstated, conscious or unconscious, advertent or inadvertent, but they are always there. Without a guiding doctrine and compatible behavioral techniques for implementing it, no management program can be viable. The first administrative doctrine was that contained in the brutality of military discipline: “Do this or die.” Indeed, one of the main reasons officers traditionally carried pistols was to shoot their own men if they were not sufficiently enthusiastic about obeying an order—especially one involving great danger. As Edward Gibbon wrote in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), “It was an inflexible maxim of Roman discipline that a good soldier should dread his own officers far more than the enemy.”

A more modern example of a doctrine is **Henry Ford’s** famous simplistic dictum: “All that we ask of the men is that they do the work which is set before them.” With Ford there was an underlying assumption that employees who do not respond adequately to the “work which is set before them” should be dismissed. (A much better alternative than being shot!) The

Henry Ford (1863–1947) ■

The founder of Ford Motor Company, which first mass-produced automobiles on a moving assembly line.

behavioral technique used here is the same as that applied to those small experimental animals who have spent generations running through mazes for psychologists. The more work, the more cheese.

More sophisticated doctrines are needed when meaningful and fulfilling work for its employees is a central goal of the organization. Here the underlying assumptions are radically different. Wages are not the only reason for working! Strategies that emerge from this management value and philosophy are more conducive to long-term organizational **effectiveness** and **productivity**. Just as religious doctrine often defines an individual's attitude toward life, a managerial doctrine defines management's values and attitude toward work and people at work. By the exercise of its doctrinal philosophy, management earns a reciprocal attitude from others toward their responsibilities. This is why doctrines, values, and attitudes on the part of management so often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Employees and managers, like students and teachers, tend to live up (or down) to expectations.

But doctrine and attitudes do far more than affect the **morale** and performance of individual employees; they are part of the culture of the organization, and the organizational culture affects the overall competence or incompetence of an organization. When managers are heavily constrained by official doctrine, by standard operating procedures, and by "the book," they cannot use discretion to respond to changing circumstances. Faced with an obvious right decision that is contrary to formal policy, they all too often dutifully make the wrong decision, feeling that they have no choice. This is a faulty conception of managerial responsibility. Any organization that does not allow its managers to appropriately respond to changing conditions is headed for a fall. It is this conception, this philosophy, this doctrine of leadership as expressed by the organization's culture and as manifest in the organization's policies that ultimately determines success or failure, victory or defeat, competence or incompetence.

Administrative doctrines resemble the paradigms of Thomas S. Kuhn. In his landmark 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn explained that as the natural sciences progressed, they amassed a body of ever-changing theory. Scientific advances were based not on the accumulation of knowledge and facts but rather on a dominant paradigm (or model) used in any specific period to explain the phenomena under study. Rather than refuting previous theories, each paradigm would build on the body of relevant knowledge and theories. Once a paradigm was accepted by consensus among current scholars, it would last as long as it was useful. Ultimately, it would be replaced by a more relevant and useful paradigm; this process of replacement was Kuhn's "scientific revolution."

While paradigms have their own timeframes and contents, they overlap both in time and content because they are constantly evolving. In a parallel sense, doctrinal development in administration has been inherently cyclical.

(continued)

Effectiveness ■

Traditionally, the extent to which an organization accomplishes some predetermined goal or objective; more recently, the overall performance of an organization from the viewpoint of some strategic constituency. Effectiveness is not entirely dependent on the efficiency of a program because program outputs may increase without necessarily increasing effectiveness.

Productivity ■

The measured relationship between the quantity (and quality) of results produced and the quantity of resources required for production. Productivity is, in essence, a measure of the work efficiency of an individual, a work unit, or a whole organization.

Morale ■

The collective attitude of the workforce toward their work environment and a crude measure of the organizational climate.

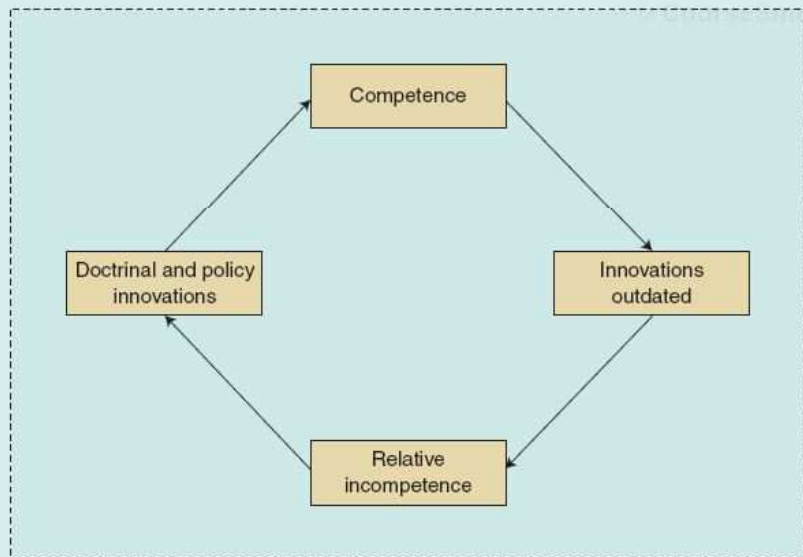


FIGURE 6.2

The cyclical nature of doctrinal and policy development

A successful innovation by reformers is followed by a period of increased effectiveness, at least until competing organizations adopt similar reforms. But over time, advancing technologies and changing environments allow the innovation to deteriorate relative to other arrangements—first to become less competent, then to become incompetent. After an innovative change remedies the problem, the cycle of competence and incompetence repeats. This “time lag” phenomenon is similar to the traditional boom-and-bust business cycle, with incompetence occurring when the cycle is in recession. Thus maintaining organizational competence is a never-ending struggle.

This is why competing organizations tend to look like each other over time. Whenever an innovation earns a reputation for being successful, it is copied by others wishing to be equally successful. But equality in structure and equipment is not always enough to ensure being a successful competitor. A famous example will illustrate. During the spring of 1940, Nazi Germany conquered France using tanks and troops in a **blitzkrieg** formation. Germany won despite the fact that France not only had more troops, but also significantly more tanks that were of better quality. What made the difference was the fact that the Germans had a better tactical doctrine for the use of their tanks—in massed assaults as opposed to piecemeal support for infantry.

Remember that the military, the seminal administrative institution of all societies, only has to be led in battle a relatively few days of any year. But it

Blitzkrieg ■

German for “lightning war,” the tactical method used by the German army in the invasion of Poland, France, and the Soviet Union during World War II. The classic blitzkrieg campaign involves swift strikes with tanks and planes and a series of army columns exploiting weak spots in the enemy line. Advance units pass behind the enemy, destroying its lines of communication and disrupting unit cohesion.

has to be administered every day. Societies may be protected by their standing armies or navies, but armed forces cannot stand or float without administrative institutions to support them. It is often true, as Mao Zedong famously said, that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” But political power is empty and meaningless without concomitant economic and administrative power. Historian Paul Kennedy in his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* demonstrated how in modern times ultimate victory went to the state that was economically strong. Those that were merely militarily strong—Austria, France, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, and the Soviet Union—all suffered from “imperial overstretch” and declined as great powers.

Revolutionaries with their guns can start a revolution, but only the administrators who follow in their wake can solidify and complete it. Thus all conquering armies have necessarily been followed by hordes of bureaucrats. Napoléon solidified the French Revolution of 1789 with the administrative reforms embodied in the Code Napoléon and the creation of a merit-based civil service. The U.S. Constitution of 1787, which followed the Revolution of 1776, still provides the administrative framework of American government. The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the administrative apparatus of a socialist state that, with its **command economy**, was so cumbersome and inefficient that a subsequent revolution in 1991 replaced it with a regime that had greater hopes for efficiency. All the political revolutions in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s, while initially politically motivated, increasingly became administrative revolutions to secure for their people the blessings of a new administrative doctrine that allows a state’s economy to function with the greater efficiency offered by a free market.

Every major political revolution—from the American to the French to the Russian—can be said to have been caused by the same thing—poor public administration. Remember that the large middle section of the American Declaration of Independence is a list consisting largely of administrative complaints against George III, the British king. For example, the Declaration asserted that the king “has obstructed the administration of justice,” has imposed “taxes on us without our consent,” and “has erected a multitude of new offices and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.” Simply put: Happy and prosperous people do not revolt. Revolutions are caused by incompetent public administration, and they are made by disgruntled consumers of government services. This is why an effective public administration doctrine is so important—because no society can live in peace and prosperity, or prevail in war, without it. It is a matter of national security!

For Discussion: *Why is an effective administrative doctrine essential for the successful public administration of a state? Why is the competence/incompetence cycle of large organizations so much like the boom and bust of the traditional business cycle?* ▲

Command economy ■

The traditional economic model offered by communism wherein all industry is controlled by a central government that makes all decisions and appoints all managers.