1

Introduction

Bureaucracy has a rational character; rules, means, ends, and matter-of-factness dominate its bearing.

Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft,* 1922

A bureaucratic organization is an organization that cannot correct its behavior by learning from its errors.

Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon,* 1964

In Terry Gilliam's movie *Brazil* (1985), a low-level civil servant is confronted with a problem that is not being solved through the regular business processes of his organization. The protagonist, Sam Lowry, works at the Ministry of Information, which is responsible for processing information requests from other government agencies, archiving government documents, and keeping citizen records. The problem that Lowry tries diligently to solve is the immediate result of a technical failure of a government printer brought about by a *literal* bug: an insect falls into the printer at the moment that the printer is processing arrest warrants. The insect causes a stain on a form, changing "Mr. Tuttle" into "Mr. Buttle" by smearing the first "T." This splotch goes unnoticed by the people in charge of the printer; as a result, an innocent man, Mr. Buttle, is arrested and the (presumably) guilty Mr. Tuttle gets away. An activist on behalf of the unfortunate Buttle family attempts to bring the case to the

government's attention, but she is routinely stonewalled by front desk officials.

Because he has personal feelings for the activist, Lowry attempts to intercede with the relevant agencies. The initial response of the government is to deny the error because, after all, the whole system was designed to be impervious to error. To acknowledge an error would be to suggest a design flaw in the state apparatus. In addition, because the base assumption is that no mistakes are possible, no redress procedures exist. The activist helping Mrs. Buttle discovers this fact first, as she is sent from one office to the next with a dismissive "It's not our problem." Lowry goes beyond his job description in his efforts to help the activist and the Buttles—behavior that upsets his superiors—and he endangers himself by trying to remedy the dysfunction. In fact, for siding with the victims of a government mistake, Lowry himself is declared an enemy of the state.

Bureaucracy and Bureaucratic Dysfunction

There is something about bureaucracy that is profoundly unsettling. As a type of organization, it is all around us and we are familiar with its workings. At the same time, we find bureaucracies to be alienating and frustrating institutions. We are generally quite content with the bureaucratic process and the substantive outcomes accomplished through bureaucratic organizations, yet we are quick to dismiss the entire enterprise when something goes wrong. While we encounter public sector bureaucracies primarily as clients, our expectations and standards are also informed by our roles as taxpayers, voters, employees, employers, concerned citizens, and so forth. The claims that we make about the performance of bureaucracies are often incomplete and contradictory; like the blind scholars in John Godfrey Saxe's poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant," we stumble upon the phenomenon and exercise judgment based on limited information and our personal perspective. As a public, we often are inarticulate and incoherent in expressing our values, interests, and preferences with regard to public sector bureaucracies.

For that reason, bureaucratic dysfunction in the public sector is a practical as well as a theoretical problem. If there is no clarity or con-

The Blind Men and the Elephant (John Godfrey Saxe—1816–1887)

sensus about what we expect from well-functioning bureaucracies, figuring out whether and how bureaucracies are dysfunctional will be an intellectual and a practical challenge. As it seeks to produce actionable knowledge to deal with bureaucratic dysfunction, this book addresses both of those challenges. By constructing conceptual frameworks, discussing theoretical perspectives, and conducting an empirical inquiry into the phenomenon, I develop a novel and hopefully more adequate approach to an age-old, untamed problem.[1] In so doing, I aim to make a contribution to social science as well as to public problem solving in practice.[2] But first it is necessary to take a step back and ask what the nature of the problem is and why it needs solving.

In the case of Mr. Buttle's tragically mistaken identity, one may answer that the problem was simply a matter of technical failure caused by the malfunctioning printer. After all, without the jammed printer, there would have been no further trouble. Another answer could be that because of their negligence, the individuals operating the printer were the problem. If they had exercised better quality control, the problem would have been solved right there. However, a more

1. Major studies of bureaucratic dysfunction dating back to the 1950s have argued that the problem has a tendency to persist despite efforts to eliminate it or counteract the consequences (Bozeman 2000; Merton 1952; Kaufman 1977; Albrow 1970; Blau 1956; Crozier 1964).

2. On the social science end, I aim specifically to contribute to bureaucratic theory and public value theory. How this study contributes to those theories, as well as to the concept of the practice of public problem solving, is discussed in chapter 2.

advanced analysis of the problem suggests that all organizations should anticipate some technical failures and human errors. Therefore, in Mr. Buttle's case the blame should have been placed not on the printer or its operators but on the management and oversight of the entire Ministry of Information. Better monitoring and accountability mechanisms could have prevented the tragic course of events that unfolded.

Yet another line of reasoning could be that the root cause of the incident was an overall lack of responsiveness, flexibility, and problem-solving capacity, which turned a small problem into a big problem. However, that assessment implies that the underlying problem could not have been solved with the resolution of the Buttle case alone. After all, simply fixing the printer, reprimanding individuals, or adjusting business processes would not have guaranteed against similar future problems. Instead, one would have had to investigate patterns deeply entrenched in organizational culture and dysfunctional mechanisms innate to the institution, such as a punitive accountability structure that systematically pushed blame onto low-level workers. Then again, some people may dismiss all of these answers entirely: "Don't make too much of this—it was just a bug!"

It is difficult to pinpoint where problems begin and where they end, and any decision on the matter depends very much on how far one is willing to pursue the discussion. But pinpointing is exactly what we need to do if we want to take public problem solving seriously—and if we want to get better at it. This chapter begins the book by defining the problem and offering the rationale for the research presented.

Encounters Gone Wrong

Bureaucratic dysfunction is experienced most directly in actual encounters between clients and bureaucracies in the public sector.[3] By "public sector clients" I mean people who in one form or another engage in transactions with the government.[4] Clients take on different

3. These encounters may be actual (face-to-face) or virtual (conducted in cyberspace), and they may occur in city hall offices, on the streets, or in people's homes. I use the term "encounter" here in the broadest possible sense of the word. A conceptual framework for analyzing problematic encounters is presented in chapter 2.

4. In chapter 2 I elaborate on this definition. For an overview and discussion of the concept of "public sector client," see Alford (2009) and Hoogwout (2010).

roles because their relationships and interactions with the government vary in nature. When the government is a direct provider of services and benefits, clients encounter the state as beneficiaries or as customers—in general terms, in the role of *recipient*. When the government regulates social and economic behavior and enforces its regulations through licensing, inspections, and other means of control, clients encounter the state in a different role: they do not receive services or goods; instead they are subject to requirements with which they must comply, in the role of *obligatee* (Sparrow 1994; Moore 1995; Alford 2009).

If clients experience the consequences of bureaucratic dysfunction in their role as recipient, they may have trouble accessing services or obtaining benefits. In their role as obligatee, they may for one reason or another find it difficult or costly to comply. Problems may vary from minor misunderstandings to major conflicts between officials and clients. Waiting times might be long, procedures cumbersome, and paperwork incomprehensible. Sometimes client and government may not encounter each other at all because one could not locate the other. In addition, encounters may last too long because the parties could not effectively conclude their transaction.[5] When encounters go wrong and clients and governments cannot complete their business, losses are incurred (Howard 1994; United Nations 2008; World Bank 2009; OECD 2007, 2010). Clients may suffer material losses (opportunities, benefits, money, and time) as well as immaterial losses (energy, hope, dignity, and respect for government). If that happens infrequently and inadvertently, it may be a simple matter of bureaucratic flaws or errors. Human beings make mistakes, and since organizations are designed, managed, and populated by human beings, so do bureaucracies.

In the case of Mr. Buttle in *Brazil,* determining whether the losses are the result of simple human error or deeper bureaucratic dysfunction raises the question of whether the problem is an exceptional or a fundamental issue. In other words, is the Buttles' predicament an extraordinary case or the result of a structural problem within an organization? At first glance, it appears to be the former. After all, the chances of a bug falling into a printer and causing a smear resembling another letter in the alphabet are not very high.

5. Chapters 2 and 3 elaborate on the variety of things that can go wrong in theory, while chapters 5 and 6 offer numerous examples of encounters that did go wrong in practice.

Many "bugs" are not easily detected in bureaucratic organizations. In addition, it is conceivable that many small undetected problems can culminate in exceptional problems, with serious consequences. Moreover, problems may not be the only exception to the rule. The fact that the Buttles' difficulties came to the attention of a civil servant may be the exception—not the bug in the printer. When bureaucratic encounters go wrong frequently, flaws appear to be systemic, and errors seem to follow a pattern, then something more serious might be happening. When bureaucracies fail to notice and address structural problems in their encounters with clients, they enter the domain of bureaucratic dysfunction.

Loss of Value

Bureaucratic dysfunction often is evaluated in terms of loss of value to the client. In problematic encounters, the negative consequences are experienced first and foremost by clients. Clients define government performance to a large extent in terms of the government's ability to construct productive encounters.[6] I argue, however, that the public also loses, if indirectly. By "the public," I mean the citizenry at large, which as a collective has mandated the government to act on its behalf. In liberal democracies, the public expects the government to carry out its tasks efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the rule of law. These tasks include delivering public services to clients and imposing duties on clients. But the expected results of government activities go beyond client satisfaction (Moore 1995). The public is interested in the social outcomes accomplished through encounters with clients. For example, in the case of public ser-

6. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, SCP) recorded that 53 percent of the population had confidence in the capacity of government agencies to perform well. In 2008 a comprehensive survey was conducted on the quality of public services as perceived by users and non-users. The data showed that on average, satisfaction with services had increased, although there was high variability across the range of services; however, citizens were considerably more satisfied with the product of the service than with the process of acquiring the product or using the service (Pommer, Van Kempen, and Eggink 2008). The SCP observed that most of the government's efforts had gone into improving product quality—for example, safer medical procedures—while the users were primarily concerned about waiting lists, lack of information, and the way in which they were treated.

vices, such as income support, health care, and education, the public hopes to achieve a fair distribution of wealth and increased public health, well-being, and economic potential. In the case of regulations, such as food safety standards, traffic laws, and rules governing business transactions, the public hopes to protect itself from harms.[7]

So if government bureaucracies become dysfunctional and fail to establish constructive and productive encounters, they do more than just dissatisfy clients: they fail to improve social outcomes. In such cases, the public has reasons for concern. It has legitimized government intervention through elections and paid for it through taxes. If the government is not delivering services adequately, the question arises of whether it is using tax money effectively and efficiently. If it is not implementing or enforcing regulations adequately, concerns arise regarding the use of law: is the government using its authority carefully and in proportion to its task? While disgruntled clients may ask these questions in their roles as recipients and obligatees, the public can ask them from a different perspective, for different reasons. If bureaucracies are dysfunctional, government fails the public in at least two ways: it is not using its authority and fiscal resources responsibly, and it is not achieving optimal social outcomes.

Who Cares?

Does the public care whether the government uses its authority and fiscal resources responsibly and achieves optimal social outcomes? Do people care if some people or groups of people are having significant trouble with government red tape while they are not? When does red tape become a serious problem for the public? While the perspective of the individual public sector client may seem straightforward, the general public does not always articulate its preferences

7. Obviously, members of the public may disagree about the necessity, desirability, and specific characteristics of many public policies. The point is that the social compact in liberal democracies rests on the notion that as *a public,* people invest in collective arrangements administered by the government. The fruits of governmental efforts are enjoyed by individual clients (especially in the case of public services and benefits) and by the public at large (especially in the case of regulations).

or concerns well. It does, of course, comprise a diverse body of people who have different values, interests, positions, and opinions; moreover, competing values and contradictory positions may exist even within an individual member of the public. The public may care about optimal social outcomes but also about the responsible use of tax money. It may have concerns about easy access to services and benefits: for example, it may subscribe to the notion of employment benefits but worry about moral hazard among recipients if it is too easy to get a government handout. In fact, the public may implicitly endorse policies that make encounters cumbersome, unpleasant, or simply impossible as a means of rationing services (Lipsky 1984, p. 3; 2008, p. 137; de Jong, and Rizvi 2008). As a result, what appears to be dysfunction to a certain group of clients may be seen by the public at large as an effective way to limit access to services.[8] The public may not pressure government to improve the performance of certain government bureaucracies because it wants to protect specific interests, save money, exclude certain groups of clients, or simply sabotage the accomplishment of certain social outcomes. However, very rarely will the public articulate its values, goals, or preferences—or its views with respect to making trade-offs.[9]

In *Brazil*, Sam Lowry doesn't know at first how serious the problem is or how frequently it occurs. The case itself is not enough to motivate him to take any substantial action. Were it not for his feelings for the activist helping the Buttles, he would not go through all the trouble. The lack of a sense of urgency to act on what seem to be tragic cases and unfortunate mistakes prompts a third question: Whose problem is it, anyway?

Only when Lowry decides to get to the bottom of the matter do his superiors and colleagues at other government departments be-

8. While this seems contradictory, the mechanism is understandable if we keep in mind that the public embodies many different opinions and ideas about what is good, fair, and just. Governments typically are elected by a majority of voters, implying that a substantial portion of the public might not agree with some or all of a government's policies.

9. The outcome of an election—an important expression of public opinion—can be taken as an articulate endorsement or rejection of certain policies. At the same time, many people vote not for particular policies but for particular candidates; referendums, of course, are an exception.

come concerned. However, the problem that they perceive is not that Mr. Buttle has been victimized or that the government has made a mistake; they are concerned because Lowry is trying to address the incident. His superiors repeatedly ask him to drop the case. Since he does not, Lowry himself becomes a problem. This problem, however, is much more easily solved: Lowry is arrested and put away.[10]

In the end, both the innocent client, Mr. Buttle, and the well-intentioned civil servant, Sam Lowry, become casualties of a system that refuses to deal with bureaucratic dysfunction. Lowry's position and attitude are especially interesting in this regard. In the beginning his actions are dictated by the rigid accountability system of the bureaucracy, by adherence to rules and obedience to authority. The turning point comes when Lowry decides that it would be morally irresponsible to hide behind the formal accountability structure. To him, the value lost by not addressing the consequences of a serious mistake is greater than the value gained by staying on the straight and narrow. Then the pendulum swings the other way: Lowry pledges allegiance to the task at hand—resolving the Buttle issue. Consequently, Lowry's actions are no longer aligned with those desired by the Ministry of Information. Having switched sides, Lowry is now held accountable for his actions by the activist, not the ministry. Is there a better way to deal with bureaucratic dysfunction than to abandon one set of accountability standards for another? Is there a way to appreciate the value of rules, regulations, and chain of command and simultaneously create real value for clients and reduce the negative effects of inflexible bureaucracies?

I advocate an approach to problem solving that does not ignore or abandon accountability systems but transforms them and makes them more responsive to exceptions, changing circumstances, and the broader context of public organizations. Such an approach could detect and address problems so that people like Mr. Buttle could avoid a tragic fate and people like Sam Lowry could make positive changes without sacrificing their well-being.

10. The ending of the movie leaves Lowry's exact fate open to question. For a discussion of the movie, see *Brazil* (www.imdb.com/Brazil).

A Problem without a Public

In *The Public and Its Problems*, the American philosopher John Dewey examines the workings of democratic societies in terms of the ability of the public to understand and act in its own interests (Dewey 1954). While the functioning or malfunctioning of the government apparatus in the implementation of public policy affects the interests of the public significantly, no public per se exists with regard to bureaucratic dysfunction.[11] In the political debate, the spotlight is typically on public policy. While public sector clients are quite perceptive regarding the consequences of bureaucratic dysfunction to the extent that it affects them or people that they know, they are less aware of the magnitude and nature of value losses caused by malfunctioning institutions.[12] For a long time the focus has been on the client, particularly on the (aggregated) loss of value to individuals (Bozeman 2000; Barzelay and Armajani 1992; OECD 2007, 2010). I argue that as a society, we lose more than the sum of all the time, money, and energy wasted in cumbersome bureaucratic encounters. We lose the ability to deliver our collective goals, uphold our values, and keep our faith in the project of building a good system of governance for a just and prosperous society. There is a lot at stake here, both in a material and an immaterial sense. But to assess the real loss—and the real opportunities for improvement—we need a more comprehensive assessment of the problem, its causes, and its consequences. Taking a step back to assess the problem helps us not only to under-

11. Moore and Fung has recognized Dewey's notion of "calling a public into existence" as an important part of the work of value-seeking public managers who would like to contribute to social change (Benington and Moore 2011). Chapters 2 and 3 further elaborate on this notion in the context of public problem solving applied to the issue of value loss and bureaucratic dysfunction.

12. There is, of course, ongoing public, academic, and political debate about the proper role and size of government and government performance. For a discussion, see Zuurmond and de Jong (2010), Noordegraaf (2008), de Jong and Zuurmond (2010), and Howard (2011). In such debates, which typically are very general and ideological, "bureaucracy" and government at large often are subjected to wholesale attacks. However, my focus is not on the general question of whether bureaucracy is a good system but on particular situations in which bureaucracy fails—at least from the vantage point of some major stakeholders—to produce public value.

stand why bureaucratic dysfunction has been such a persistent problem in modern societies but also to develop a more sophisticated approach to dealing with the problem.

Red Tape as an Entry Point

If the problem of bureaucratic dysfunction is so complex and elusive, where and how do we start to investigate it? There is probably no one best way to do it; as discussed in the following chapters, each approach has advantages and disadvantages. However, an actual encounter gone wrong between bureaucracies and clients provide us with a good point of departure. The issue of red tape, understood from the perspective of the client as excessive bureaucratic requirements, can serve as a point of entry into a more comprehensive study of underlying mechanisms and how they could be remedied. Red tape is commonly understood as excessive regulation, unreasonable application of rules, cumbersome procedures, burdensome administrative requirements, unintelligible bureaucratic behavior, or any combination of those elements. It is associated with the mindboggling experience of having to deal with dysfunctional bureaucratic organizations (Merton 1952; Kaufman 1977; Howard 1994; Barzelay and Armajani 1992; Bardach and Kagan 2002; Mashaw 1983; Bozeman 2000).

The encounter gone wrong can be described as a clinical opportunity to diagnose and remedy losses of value to the individual client and to the public at large. Our attention is directed first to the interaction between client and government (not to the public's opinion of how the bureaucracy is functioning), but we simultaneously set out to discover the public dimensions of bureaucratic dysfunction by unraveling the complexities of red tape. Red tape may be an entry point, but it is certainly not the end point of the inquiry.[13]

While red tape refers to symptoms—the problems on the surface as immediately experienced by clients—bureaucratic dysfunction refers

13. The three forms of inquiry into the phenomenon of bureaucratic dysfunction undertaken in this book—conceptual, theoretical, and empirical—have this in common: the effort to uncover the multiple ways in which bureaucratic dysfunction constitutes a loss of public value and simultaneously to identify ways to counteract the problem.

to underlying mechanisms that adversely affect the performance of government bureaucracies. Since this book aims to unravel the relationships between value lost to the client and value lost to the public, it focuses on cases of red tape that best exemplify the varied and contested nature of the problem. As discussed in chapter 2, cases that are both technically and politically complicated provide the best entry points for clinical research. These cases are characterized by lack of both information and consensus among those involved about the causes and consequences of the problematic situation. Since the very definition of the problem is at stake, these cases are most likely to provide a good entry point for learning what value is lost and how it could or should be regained. Also, complex cases—think "Buttle"—are least likely to get noticed and be solved by regular problem-solving mechanisms and institutions.

Practical and Theoretical Challenges

Bureaucratic dysfunction is both a real-life problem and a matter of academic interest. While the academic literature on the subject is rich and diverse, it has not provided much actionable knowledge on how to resolve the problems of bureaucratic dysfunction in practice. The literature that does offer "solutions" typically disregards the varied nature of the phenomenon.[14] There is a plethora of one-size-fits-all remedies for dysfunctional bureaucracies that are prescribed without proper diagnosis—for example, pleas for deregulation, smaller government, more room for the professional, adopting private sector models for customer service, and so forth. Despite their merits, these approaches ignore an important dimension of the problem: "dysfunction" is a socially constructed problem with political implications, and value trade-offs are made in addressing it. As discussed earlier, claims about bureaucracy are made from a variety of vantage points, depending on the stakeholder's perspective and interests. What some people find dysfunctional may not be that disturbing to others. The challenge is to approach the problem rigorously while remaining sen-

14. Examples of generic "business" solutions that have inspired public managers and policymakers over the past two decades include Kaplan and Norton (1996, 2006), Hammer (2001), and George (2003).

sitive to the intricacies and complexities of its social and political context.

Understanding Bureaucratic Dysfunction

Because bureaucratic dysfunction is a varied and slippery phenomenon, working toward a fuller understanding requires a multi-dimensional approach. To see the problem clearly, one has to synthesize insights from the abstract world of theory and literature and bring these directly to bear on the real-world interactions, experiences, and efforts of those on both sides of bureaucratic encounters.

Conceptual, Theoretical, and Empirical Explorations

How can we effectively deal with bureaucratic dysfunction? That is the question that this book intends to answer, in three different ways. First, it examines the subject *conceptually*, using ideas borrowed from bureaucracy theory and public value theory. To that end, chapter 2 elaborates on the definition of the research problem and develops conceptual distinctions to guide the ensuing theoretical and empirical explorations. It also situates the study in the academic literature. Chapter 3 explores the manifestations of the phenomenon theoretically, by discussing and organizing the academic literature from a variety of disciplines to provide a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the problem. It also offers a meta-framework that helps shape a diagnostic approach to dealing with the problem in practice. Chapter 4 discusses the methodological implications for further inquiry into the conclusions in the literature review. It explains how I generated and used the empirical data, and it acknowledges the merits and limits of the methodology. Chapter 5 describes in detail the operating principles and techniques that the Kafka Brigade, a diagnostic team, used and how they were developed over time in the first four case studies, while chapter 6 presents a systematic, in-depth investigation of ten additional cases of red tape. In chapters 7 and 8 I revisit the question of how to deal with bureaucratic dysfunction and answer it on the basis of the results of the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical inquiries. I discuss under what conditions a clinical approach

like the one pioneered by the Kafka Brigade is most likely to resolve the problem of bureaucratic dysfunction, and I present guiding principles for a generic *process* solution to the problem. I also suggest ways in which this solution and the principles that guide it can be further tested in practice.

Academic Research and the Kafka Brigade

My clinical work and academic study have informed each other. This book is the result of a sustained effort to seek a deeper understanding of a problem that I care about through two separate but linked avenues of inquiry. Driven by worries about the limited scope and poor results of so-called reform agendas in the public sector and inspired by new ideas and emerging practices, I collaborated with colleagues to establish a research team with a novel problem-solving methodology, the Kafka Brigade (Docters van Leeuwen and others 2003; de Jong and others 2004). The activities of the Kafka Brigade, which was first launched in the Netherlands, evolved from the cooperative efforts of many individuals, including Arre Zuurmond and Joeri van den Steenhoven. The Kafka Brigade—named after the great novelist Franz Kafka, who wrote about the hope and despair of individuals living in the alienating landscape of modern bureaucracy—was an independent team focused on organizational learning across government silos and levels of management. The brigade investigated cases in which people had fallen through the cracks and did not know where to go—cases like that of Mr. Buttle, which, while not always as grim, often were more complex and never easy to solve. The cases were examples of how value was being lost, for the individual person, for the larger category of people in similar situations, and for society at large. A final similarity in the cases was that what mechanisms caused the problems and what could be done to solve them was unclear to the clients, professionals, managers, and policymakers involved.

Using a bottom-up diagnostic approach, collaborative inquiry, creative problem-solving techniques, and a pressure-cooker environment, the Kafka Brigade has tapped into the knowledge and experience of hundreds of public officials and public sector clients. As a result, the research of the brigade presented and examined in this book involved many instances of identifying, defining, diagnosing, and attempting

to remedy bureaucratic dysfunction. The data set consists of documented cases of red tape researched by the Kafka Brigade, as well as documented reflections by academic and practitioners alike regarding the cases and methods. I treat the whole Kafka Brigade enterprise, from its inception to its consolidation, as a single case. This one case, of course, consists of many small cases. Methodologically, it is important to emphasize the distinction between the research presented in this book as an academic study and the research of the Kafka Brigade, conducted by a clinical team in the field. The former uses the Kafka Brigade experience to explore bureaucratic dysfunction as a phenomenon and to make recommendations about how to deal with it in general. The latter investigates real-life cases to diagnose and remedy particular instances of bureaucratic dysfunction in practice. Both kinds of research require methodological justification, which is provided in chapter 4.

Applying the principles and criteria for validity and quality discussed in chapter 4, I reflect on the Kafka Brigade's experimental approach to problem solving in order to develop an approach to help practitioners deal with red tape in particular instances. This approach is different from the one-size-fits-all substantive remedies in that it does not prescribe a cure but suggests a diagnostic protocol. While the Kafka Brigade has been successful in facilitating the diagnosis and treatment of bureaucratic dysfunction in some cases, it has failed in others. The report on the Kafka Brigade research is therefore not a story of successful solutions but an account of probing, learning while doing, and critically reflecting on factors that may lead to failure or success.

Advancing Knowledge on Public Problem Solving

If the state of scientific knowledge about bureaucratic dysfunction or dealing with red tape in practice had allowed it, conducting a systematic, quantitative, empirical social science study would have been the preferred method of inquiry. It would have enabled me to make more universal claims about the nature of the problem and the relationships between causes and effects. If red tape and bureaucratic dysfunction were less contested, varied, and elusive phenomena, I would have been able to construct a dependent variable ("bureaucratic dysfunction") and test hypotheses about the effectiveness of specific

interventions ("ways to deal with it") in terms of their effect on the dependent variable. I would then have been able to do empirical social science research, perhaps even randomized controlled trials, on the effectiveness of these interventions in solving the problem. If the research were broad and systematic enough, significant findings might have appeared that could lead to generalizable conclusions. One of the theoretical motivations for my research has been to contribute to the possibility of a quantitative empirical research method in the future.

As of yet, there is no integrated conceptual framework that captures the phenomenon of bureaucratic dysfunction and there are no comprehensive theories that provide testable hypotheses. Any attempt that pretends otherwise is likely to lead to flawed generalizations and imperfect conclusions. To stay true to the principles of social science, I chose plan B. If we value close attention to empirical facts and methodological rigor, we need to use an appropriate method of inquiry. This must be a method that engages with the issue and with those who are involved with the issue. While it may not produce results that are universal truths, it contributes to theory and practice.

In the concluding chapter I reflect on my chosen path. My dual goal, to improve knowledge as well as practice, has informed my research strategy and methodological choices. In retrospect, they may seem unnecessarily laborious, clumsy at times, and not particularly parsimonious. Still, compared with what the literature on the subject has yielded in terms of analysis and practical guidance, this path may not be the worst. Forty years ago Herbert Kaufman, who wrote one of the first books that focused specifically on bureaucratic dysfunction, advised: "What we need is a detached clinical approach rather than heated attacks, the delicate wielding of the scalpel rather than furious flailing about with a meat ax" (Kaufman 1977). This book aims to meet that need.