Some Ad Hoc Propositions About Public Management

1) An important tactic of a policy advocate is to emphasize one aspect of an issue rather than another: i.e. to give it a certain "face." This is important because it often determines which decision-making process will have jurisdiction over the issue, how individuals in the process will be initially disposed on the issue, and which players who are not necessarily involved will become involved. In general, the advocate should emphasize those aspects of an issue that bring the issue to processes and players that are likely to agree with his position.

2) A congressional oversight hearing can be used to influence administration policy in two different ways: by publicizing the issue in a way that changes the "conventional wisdom" in a given area, and by gaining a public commitment from the administrator in charge of a given policy. Both mechanisms depend crucially on media coverage. To obtain coverage, the hearing must be scheduled to be consistent with the operating procedures of the media, and must be organized to tell a dramatic story with mystery, conflict, dramatic examples, and stark positions.

3) In seeking to improve the performance of a large organization, one must first ask how much of the activities of one's employees can be guided by the specific organization of "the production process," and how much by a statistical control system. To the extent activities can be controlled by the design of the production process (the extreme example here is an assembly line), it provides an appropriate avenue of managerial influence. To the extent that a control system can be created which summarizes the relevant outputs of individual employees or units, that becomes a useful instrument of managerial influence. When neither production process nor control systems do the job, however, one must rely on either the personnel system or first line supervisors. Since most public sector organizations do not have well defined production processes or easily described outputs, public managers are most often dependent on personnel systems and first line supervisors.

4) Managers can increase their ability to influence their employees by selecting people for their organizations who like the things that the organization has a lot of. Thus, it is valuable for a police department to recruit people who like excitement, and for Harvard University to recruit people who like professional status and prestige since the organizations can then produce the same output for less money.

5) Structural changes in organizations and shifts in personnel are often more effective devices for re-allocating resources in an organization than on budgetary processes. The reason is that there are always strong political pressures for being fair and equitable in the budget process. Thus, if one wanted to shrink one part of an organization, a useful approach is to slow

down promotions within the unit and shift key personnel to other units. This will sufficiently weaken the unit that it can be effectively cut in the budget process. Alternatively, one can strengthen a function or organizational unit by elevating its status in the organization. If one assistant director has 2% of the budget and all the others have 20%, the smaller unit will probably grow faster than the other units.

6) A "project management" structure can most usefully be used in an organization when the project has a finite goal, when its accomplishment depends on the co-ordination of elements that cross the main structural lines of an organization, and when there is a sufficient sense of crisis to legitimate the authority of whoever becomes the project manager. If this structure is used to create some continuing capability in the organization, it will always be difficult to protect it or re-integrate it once the sense of urgency has been lost.

7) The choice of an organizational structure affects the following important characteristics of a public organization:

   a) The ease of operational co-ordination in performing certain tasks, and a sense of accountability;

   b) Long term allocation of resources in the organization;

   c) The ease with which existing external organizations can penetrate and have influence over an organization's internal operations;

   d) The strength of various "professional groups" in the organization, and the extent to which high status members of various professions can be recruited;

   e) The kinds of decisions that will cross the administrator's desk.

Since any particular organizational structure affects all of these things, and since a manager may have different objectives with respect to each of them, any organizational structure is likely to be a compromise. But it should be a compromise guided by each of these effects -- not just one or two.

8) An important way for managers to influence the operations of organizations they don't control directly is to operate through professional groups that are important in the target organizations. Thus, to control hospital costs and lengths of stay, it is valuable to create Professional Standards Review Organizations that create an institution committed to these objectives within the ranks of the medical profession. Similarly, the diffusion of new educational or new crime control strategies is accomplished most easily by supporting and working with the relevant professional groups.

9) Information systems typically fail to be implemented or collapse for one of three reasons: they shift power in the organization by relocating effective decisionmaking influence; the information put into the system is easily falsified; or top level managers make only occasional and periodic use of the information.

10) Employees are most responsive to cues about performance that are: a) written down and quantitative; b) appear frequently; and c) allow relative comparisons. Thus, if one has one system that is "computerized" and another that is based on supervisors' performance reviews, the computerized information is likely to dominate the employee's attention.

11) Organizational leaders can make substantial changes in an organization's pattern of activity only when there is a crisis that strengthens the managers hand. Otherwise, his intervention will be rejected and resisted.

12) In organizing a policy making process to serve an organizational leader, it is important to distinguish the "quality control function" (which insures that the leader receives effective analyses of given issues) from the "clue process function" (which insures that the leader hears from all parties that have an interest are heard from in a fair way). If they are put together in the same office or person, and if that office or person has substantive interests of his own, the "due process" function tends to be wiped out. This has disastrous effects on the capacity of the system to capture decisions, have them well staffed, and encourage implementation once the choice is made.

13) An important function of a policy-making process is to "batch decisions." This is important to take care of technical interdependencies (i.e. what we do on issue A affects what must be done on issue B). But is is also important to compensate losers at the same time they discover they are losers, or to make symbolic points especially vivid.

14) In dealing with the Press it is important to understand that one will always be disappointed in three respects: one can never receive consistently good stories, the stories that are written are always simpler, starker and less qualified than one would like, and there is always an opposing view. These characteristics are inevitable consequences of how reporters think about and do their jobs. They wouldn't have any self-respect if they were always writing puff pieces, and their stories must be succinct, entertaining and "balanced." And what balanced means is not that all your qualifications and hedges are included, but that some simpled minded critic's position is included. Knowing this, one can avoid the worst reactions to press coverage: i.e. defensiveness and a sense of betrayal.

ETC.
There are many more.