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Modern Organizational Theory vs. Improvisation“ Organization theory deals with the formal structure, internal working, and external environment of complex human behavior within organizations. As a field spanning several disciplines, it prescribes how work and workers out to be organized and attempts to explain the actual consequences of organizational behavior (including individual behavior) on work done and on the organization itself.”(Gordon and Milkavoich, 147) It has been evolving for centuries on how should work be done in the public administration and how the organization should be.

“ Research findings have emerged about what motivates workers and how different incentives affect various tasks, employees, and situations; and the environments in which they operate.” (Gordon and Milakovich, 147) Even with all those research statistics and different modes of thought toward organization there are still situations in which the rational approach to public decisions does not help. For instance, what if the environment is instable and has no guidelines or precedents to follow? In the case of Israel, improvisation has changed the organization of public administrations, uprooted the conventional models for policymaking, and strayed off from the Weberian model of administration. This kind of improvisation is the product of “ cultural and personal predilections and environmental circumstances,”(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 1) The use of improvisation is dependent on the culture and the environment in which policy decisions are made. For example, the use of improvisation is found more so in Spanish managers. Why? “ Spanish mangers express an explicit preference for spontaneous, improvised managerial style over the methodical and formal

planning favored by their American, English, and Dutch counterparts.”

(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 2) Another proponent of improvisational technique is the Israelis.

Improvisation is made inevitable in a situation where problems must be dealt with expediently and on the spur of the moment. Taking into consideration the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis, improvisation is essential to running administrations. The formal theory such of Max Weber cannot apply since its framework of rules and procedures are to ensure stability, predictability, and reliability of performance; yet, with no stability or predictability in the environment these theories only fall short of their expectations. Rational planning has already been pointed out a century ago by Herbert Simon (1976) to be “ bounded” by many factors such as: “ skills, habits, and reflexes, values, etc, which makes it impossible to achieve rational planning that is suited for the situation...Moreover, rational planning does not have primary value in Israel’s cultural heritage. Survival in the Diaspora often depended on an ability to act quickly, with limited resources, under harsh, changing, and uncertain conditions.”(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 2) With endless terrorism, continuous war, and a population growth that shifts from month to month there is the perpetual challenge to respond to each situation expediently and ingeniously.

Even with the scientific management organizational theory, the formal structure and rules, the highly centralized top management levels, and especially the standardizing procedures would make policy-making decisions disastrous for Israel. This mode of organization is to increase productivity, thus profits. Yet, Israel’s leadership has to consistently “ accomplish a wide
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variety of expensive goals with limited means. These goals included creating the infrastructure of a modern, industrial society in an undeveloped setting; creating a welfare state which could house, educate, and provide employment and healthcare for successive waves of immigrants and their children; and provide its citizens with a decent standard of living.”

(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 3) With all of these pressures to be done on an economy of scarcity, the profit idea fits nowhere. Improvisation began in Israel since 1967, the day the city was united under total Israeli control. It involved deviating Israel’s formal policy to keep the peace.

With the Arabs fighting for their land back and Israel’s strong willed notion to maintain all of the land under Israeli rule, it proved to be quite a task. Not only did the government had to improvise to ease the tension between the Arabs and the Israelis, they also had to settle the demands of the Religious and the Secular people. To maintain a harmonious environment the public decision makers had to improvise a way to keep the religious and secular Jews on the same level, whereby initiating one approach to appease on group and lowering the standard to appease the other. This could only be done with an open system in which the organization constantly interacts with their environment to give grounds to their decisions. This systems theory- “ which holds that organizations are like biological organisms in which they behave according to the inputs from their environment is the modern organization theory. The modern organization theory imbibes the notion of improvisation since it is open to feedback and is not closed to the public and is vulnerable to the forces in the external environment.” (Class notes)

Improvisation is integral to Israel’s public administration.

As stated before, with all the pressures to fulfill expectations of its people and the lack of funding it has provided the administrators creative ways of handling the situation. Instead of following protocols and strict chains of command, leaders are encouraged to fend for themselves in the creative war to obtain funds. " Some have persuaded commercial banks to lend money to their municipalities against the formal regulations on the argument that the national government would step in to pay up if the locality seemed on the verge of bankruptcy. Local leaders have also used crises, like terrorists attacks or a spurt in unemployment, to demand special grants.

"(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 5) Another public administrative job in which improvisation proved more effective is that of sudden immigration of Russian Jews after the collapse of the Soviet Union. If Israel had used the older version of public administrative organization it would take months to set up budgeting, land grants, building contractors, and begin construction to integrate the Russian Jews. By following the chain of command and following the protocols there would not have been any housing for any of the tens of thousands immigrants pouring in monthly. Quick action and thinking was needed with strong leadership and control. " According to one scholar, the Russian immigration constituted a " crisis," defined as a major, unanticipated change which urgently requires solutions " with high risks," and for which the existing resources, laws, and procedures are inadequate. The improvisations adopted to deal with the crisis cut constructing time in half, increased by a magnitude of four the rate of housing construction, and produced an adequate supply of housing for immigrants." This is yet another success story by using improvisation as the method of organization and

decision-making process. Improvisation maximizes the discretion of decision makers, it enables them to respond directly to problems or situations at hand, and it “ provides the opportunity for inspired evasions of the limits imposed by formal organization and the rigors of rational policy making.

”(Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 7) It can be used in vastly different ways and to different ends-to blur and delay insoluble conflicts, or with force and determination when quick action seems appropriate. It can merge pro force from the inability to implement policy, or itself be the policy, as in the case of building housing quickly for immigrants. It can be guided by an overriding vision.” (Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 7) Improvisation has the ability to arrive to conclusions or actions in an expedient and ingenious way when there are no other alternatives available. It is a means of avoiding stagnation.

It is useful when there is uncertainty, few precedents, reliable resources or protocols, few facts and suitable routines; “ when there is little way of evaluating the relative efficacy of the various alternatives; and when there is pressure to act in a short time or with resources that appear to be sufficient.

Modern organizational theory can only go so far to solve public administrative problems, but with creative thinking such as improvising more can be done for the community. Bibliography: