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Adaptive Bureaucracy and Creative
Destruction
Creating Maneuver Space in the
DOD Bureaucracy

by

Colonel Wayne A. Green
United States Army



United States Army War College
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Colonel Wayne A. Green
United States Army

Mr. Rodney Freeman, Vice President Global Facilities Management
Merck
Project Adviser

Dr. James Gordon
U.S. Army War College Faculty Mentor

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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Adaptive Bureaucracy and Creative Destruction Creating Maneuver Space in the DOD Bureaucracy

The dominant news in the halls of the Pentagon and in the beltway in 2012-2013 are equal parts North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan and furloughs, sequestration, and the DOD budget trough. Continued reductions to the DOD budget are nearly a *fait accompli*. The defense budget has grown 66 percent from \$329 Billion before 9/11 to \$525 Billion for fiscal 2013 with combat operations accounting for roughly \$20 Billion.¹ The external threat of reduced funding, however, is not the greatest threat to the efficacy of the Department. More alarming, the Department of Defense spends nearly 40% of this budget on overhead². The greater concern, then, is the decrease in the value proposition that the Department provides the Nation for each tax dollar spent if we do not choose our budget reductions wisely. Cutting the budget is relatively easy; cutting the right stuff so that the department is stronger at end state is the hard part. The Department must reduce overhead costs to provide a greater value proposition. The growth and protection of overhead is an internal threat posed by a leadership mindset and an organizational culture in a Department of Defense that is addicted to bureaucracy. The Department “solves” problems by making rules, issuing directives, launching blue ribbon committees, or creating agency structure.

American governmental bureaucracies love to make rules. By the end of 2011, the Federal Register tallied 82,351 rules that Americans are supposed to live by, adding 3,780 in that year alone.³ To be sure the Department of Defense bureaucracy is an outcropping of the American Federal Bureaucratic system that has been in the making since our founding as a Nation. For many reasons we seek the comfort of rules, to somehow bring control to our increasingly chaotic lives and environments. Many times,

however, we make rules without understanding the unintended consequences of our rule making instincts. Rather than improving our value proposition for the Department of Defense, excessive or uninformed rule-making often creates obstacles to realizing the results that we sought from the onset. Every DOD civilian, every member in uniform must think differently and together lead our way out of our bureaucratic conundrum. This paper argues that only adaptive leaders and agile organizations are capable of reconciling the tension between our instincts for bureaucracy on the one hand and the need for autonomy to spur innovation on the other.

This paper studies the characteristics of bureaucratic behavior in general and in American representative government in particular with recommendations for leaders in the Department of Defense. Rather than chronicle or endorse existing business methods or techniques to bypass bureaucracy, this paper proposes a new construct to understand the root cause of ineffective bureaucracies, the leader enabled Rules-Implementation-Compliance loop. This framework applies universally to the operational force or generating force; wherever the bureaucratic form exists. It argues that a leaders' proclivity for rules-making is a complexity generating behavior that perpetuates a cycle that deepens the hierarchical structure of an organization, multiplies its silos, unnecessarily increases waste and inefficiency, and most importantly discourages individual and organizational creativity and innovation. This paper then proposes that a new leadership mental model, Unruly Bureaucracy, that encourages routine creative destruction, can reverse this bureaucratic growth trend. This new model presupposes that American bureaucracy seeks to solve problems through the creation of new programs and processes and discourages the creative destruction of obsolete or

detrimental programs and processes.⁴ The result is an encumbered bureaucracy focused more on compliance and adherence to existing bureaucratic rules and process than on innovating to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Characteristics of the Bureaucratic Organizational Form

Bureaucracy is a broadly used and misunderstood term. It is often used imprecisely and with some stereotype to depict organizations fraught with waste, excess structure and costs, slowness, obstinacy, and those laden with rules and compliance protocols. To be fair, this is an incomplete and one-sided description that requires further examination in order to provide thoughtful recommendations for leaders operating within the American Federal Bureaucracy.

The German social scientist, Max Weber, is widely considered the father of modern bureaucratic thought. Weber's work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society), published in 1922 after his death in 1920, is so widely referenced as the definitive document on the topic that we might compare his influence on understanding the rise of bureaucratic structures with that of Jomini or Clausewitz' on the topic of war and politics.⁵ Rather than vice, Weber saw great virtue in bureaucracy. Weber concluded that the "decisive reason for the advance of the bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization."⁶ He argued that the "fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production."⁷ He continued: "As compared with all collegiate, honorific, and avocational forms of administration, trained bureaucracy is superior in...precision, speed,

unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs.”⁸

As with the theorists of war, scholars of many disciplines greatly debate Weber’s postulates. This paper will not contribute to that debate but rather will defer to Weber’s status for the generally accepted attributes of what he called the bureaucratic “ideal type”. For Weber, bureaucracy was essential to modernity because it “secured the orderly, routine, day-to-day execution of the general ordinances and commands of the Herrschaft (director)”⁹. It is characterized by a strict, taut hierarchy with resources assigned from the top. Bureaucracy means subjection to impersonal rules that remove the ineffectual personal relationships or status that plagued previous forms.

Professionals dominate bureaucracies and expertise, not favoritism, determines status and authority. “The keeping of records is decisive for Weber, not for blind addiction to routine, the colloquial connotation of bureaucracy as red tape...but as critical aspect of efficiency”¹⁰. Finally, Weber felt that bureaucratic administration was “increasingly characteristic of private, commercial, industrial, ecclesiastical, military”, and any large organization, in addition to the public sector.¹¹ Taken in this context, one can begin to see the appeal of these attributes for large organizations attempting to efficiently conduct complex undertakings. For Weber, bureaucracy was the key ingredient that enabled a break with the chaotic and inefficient past and the dawn of modernity. This perspective rings especially true when considering the alternative organizational form that was staffed by amateurs, often family appointees, with little or no supervision against a standard. This shift in perspective is informative when considering solutions to

today's criticisms of bureaucracy; if only to realize that calls for the abandonment of bureaucracy altogether are shortsighted and unrealistic.

Federalist Paper 51

And other Challenges of American Federal Bureaucracy

The American Federal Bureaucracy has served us well for over two centuries. While the Founding Fathers did not directly create the bureaucracy, they created a system of government that made its rise inevitable. Some argue that bureaucracy has become a defining characteristic of our government.¹² Rather than demagogue and bemoan its inefficiency or call for its eradication; intellectual honesty requires an understanding of its origins, evolution and the environment in which it currently operates.

The rise of American Federal bureaucracy is as old as the fear of discretionary power that fueled the genius of our Constitution.¹³ “John Locke thought the essence of freedom in a political society was to have ‘a standing rule to live by, common to everyone of that society...and not to be the subject to the inconstant, uncertain, arbitrary will of another man’. The Constitution of the United States is suffused with such Lockean sentiments, as when it speaks of equal protection of the laws.”¹⁴ In his article, *Bureaucracy and the Constitution*, Fred W. Riggs makes the case that the fear of discretion is compounded by the fear by minorities of the usurpation of power by majorities. He reminds us that James Madison, in Federalist Paper #51, “prescribed the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial powers, between the competing chambers of the bicameral Congress, and divisions of authority between the national and state governments in a federal system.”¹⁵ Paradoxically, the Founders

created the tension in our system to prevent action as much as to promote it. Each branch of government then works to exert its influence on the system and does so through the conduit of the American bureaucracy. Each branch levies rules and requirements as their primary modus operandi. By design, Congress, as the legislative branch, is a rule making body. James Q. Wilson, a recognized scholar on bureaucracy, called Congress the “architect of bureaucracy”.¹⁶ Congress establishes the size, shape and budget of the bureaucracies. Two noteworthy transformations have significantly impacted the relationship of Congress with the Department of Defense. First, Congress ended the “spoils system” of manning the bureaucracy, shifting from patronage appointments in favor of civil service reform through the Pendleton Act of 1883.¹⁷ Responding to constituent pressure that Congressional patronage appointments to the bureaucracy led to abuses, this Act introduced merit-based nonpartisan career services.¹⁸ Historian Robert H. Wiebe, in *The Search for Order*, saw civil service reform as “democracy’s cure”. He wrote “By denying politicians the spoils of office, civil service would drive out the parasites and leave only a pure frugal government behind.”¹⁹ The net effect of the Pendleton Act, however, has been the explosion of congressional micromanagement of the bureaucracy, and by default the Department of Defense after its inception following WW II. “Congressional micromanagement increasingly took the form of devising elaborate, detailed rules instead of demanding favors of particular people.”²⁰ Exacerbating the problem, in 1961 Congress began to require annual rather than open ended authorizations for the Department of Defense... “More frequent authorizations meant more chances to devise and impose rules and policy guidance on (the Defense Department)”.²¹

In response to increasing Congressional influence on the bureaucracy, the executive branch responded with the growth of a shadow bureaucracy of their own. Citing the constitutional mandate to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed; presidents have read this to mean that government agencies should be accountable to them”²². Hence, presidents now appoint thousands of political operatives outside of the civil service merit system, and have created a myriad of “White House offices designed to oversee, coordinate, and do the work of the bureaucracy”²³. For perspective; “Before 1921 there was not even an executive budget; before 1939, the Bureau of Budget was located not in the White House but in the Treasury Department.”²⁴ Since that time inter-branch competition has fostered the exponential expansion of bureaus and agencies. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan called this reciprocal cycle the “Iron Law of Emulation”: “Whenever any branch of the government acquires a new technique which enhances its power in relation to the other branches, that technique will soon be adopted by the other branches as well.”²⁵ For example, Wilson points out that President Nixon converted the comparably small “Bureau of Budget into the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB)...Congress responded by creating the General Accounting Office (GAO) so that it could make certain the agencies spent only what was appropriated; later creating the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) so that it would have its own source of budgetary information independent of the president.”²⁶

Following Moynihan’s postulate, the Courts could not leave the bureaucracy to the whims of the other branches. In his article, *Bureaucracy in the American Constitutional Order*, Francis E. Rourke, indicates that “judges have now become major actors in the policy process, largely as a result of statutes that provide broader

opportunities for private parties to challenge the decisions of executive agencies in the courts....”²⁷ In, the *Death of Common Sense*, Phillip K. Howard, points to the courts for accelerating the specificity and volume of rule making in the quest for certainty. Administrative law expert, Professor Kenneth Davis, goes so far as to declare: “...administrative rule-making is...one of the greatest inventions of modern government.” Howard laments this enthusiasm, indicating that “through detailed rules, regulation would be made certain.”²⁸ He argues that this “judicializing of agency procedures not only takes time and money”, it often makes agency heads gun-shy, reluctant to change and passive²⁹. Understanding this dynamic at work in our federal system is vital for the DOD bureaucrat, both civilian and military, for perspective on how and why our organizations expand and layer themselves over time. It also provides pragmatic context for “bureaucrats” serving in the Department of Defense who must lead our bureaucracies to a more constructive balance between rules and structure on the one hand and with innovation and creativity on the other.

Bureaucratic Growth and the Department of Defense

US charities are judged largely by the cost of their overhead, the percentage of donations that reach the intended audience versus those funds used for indirect costs of administering their programs. 20% or less overhead is generally considered an efficient charity³⁰. As previously mentioned, the defense budget has grown 66 percent from \$329 Billion before 9/11 to \$525 Billion for fiscal 2013 with combat operations accounting for roughly \$20 Billion.³¹ The United States Department of Defense spends nearly 40% of this budget on overhead³². A Defense Business Board Task Force formed to study the problem concluded in 2010 that “at least \$200 billion (of annual Defense appropriation)

is overhead...If DOD's overhead were its own nation, it would rank 49th globally in total gross domestic product – just behind Singapore and Portugal...³³ Successive Secretary's of Defense have fought to reduce this overhead imbalance. Secretary Rumsfeld's first order of business in 2001 was to take steps to shift the focus from the "bureaucracy to the battlefield", targeting just 5% savings per year to free \$15 billion to \$18 billion dollars.³⁴ His successor, Dr. Robert Gates, also recognized and decried this tooth-to-tail imbalance, saying: "We must strongly resist efforts to impose programs and changes on the department that the military does not want, cannot afford, and that take dollars from the programs the military services can and do need."³⁵

Layering and Complexification of our Hierarchies

Michelle Flournoy, who served as undersecretary of defense for policy from 2009-12, suggested recently that we have only begun to address the problem:

We must eliminate unnecessary overhead in the Pentagon, defense agencies and headquarters staffs. Since 2001, these have grown like weeds. Over the past decade, the number of DOD civilians increased by more than 100,000, to roughly 778,000 in 2010, while the number of contractors also ballooned.³⁶

The growth of structure, procedure, staff and layers over time is common to organizations both inside and outside of the Department of Defense. Only until a period of fiscal downturn is the Department now making a concerted effort to de-layer or search for redundancy and waste. For anyone experiencing such an effort, all would agree that the reversal process is slow, costly and painful. The logical strategic question is why organizations permit such growth and layering in the first place.

The Geography of Thought

There is a school of thought that suggests the bureaucratic mindset may actually be a part of the DNA of western cultures. Richard E. Nisbett, in his book, *The Geography of Thought*, instructs us that:

...scholars are in substantial agreement that European (Western) thought rests on the assumption that the behavior of objects-physical, animal and human-can be understood in terms of straightforward rules. Westerners have a strong interest in categorization, which rules to apply to the objects in question, and formal logic plays a role in problem-solving. East Asians, in contrast...understand events always require consideration of a host of factors that operate in relation to one another in no simple, deterministic way.³⁷

This is consistent with our previous suggestion of the pervasiveness of rationalist thought, particularly from the judicial branch, in the quest for certainty. This quest manifests itself in a level of prescription that robs organizations of time or inclination for innovation. Howard, in *The Death of Common Sense*, elaborates: “Rules preclude initiative, regimentation precludes evolution...leaving nothing to judgment or discretion”³⁸ This realization has important implications for development of leaders in any bureaucracy. By suggesting that bureaucratic rule-making is innate to our culture, any successful resolution to bureaucratic bloat requires effective leader action to address the bureaucratic culture. Rather than resign to bureaucratic behavior, leaders must re-train their bureaucratic instincts, and actively seek solutions to their burgeoning bureaucracies and rule-making tendencies.

Solutions to counter bureaucracy are aptly considered a “holy grail” because they can be elusive, almost mystical in nature. This is in part true because bureaucracy has become so ubiquitous. In the case of successive SECDEF’s we saw that even a senior

leader's recognition of the problem and aggressive action cannot resolve the issues of bureaucracy with any permanency. Too often bureaucracy fosters a sense of powerless defeatism; best exemplified by the colloquialism: "You can't fight city hall". Clearly there is something insidious at work under the surface of our bureaucracies.

The Rules-Implementation-Compliance (R-I-C) Loop

Weber indicated that the dominant characteristics of bureaucracies include hierarchical structure and a proclivity for rule making. However, how does this tendency slow action and increase structural "bloat" or excessive layering over time? The answer rests at least in part in a **Rules-Implement-Compliance (R-I-C) Do-Loop**. Leaders in unchecked bureaucracies initiate rules and talented people in these bureaucracies perpetuate an endless do-loop of implementation instructions and compliance protocols. In an environment where leaders and employees seek control of an ever increasingly complex environment, this is a logical response. The cycle continues until in many cases the organization "forgets" its true north and begins to exist as much or more for the perpetuation of its own rules as for its original purpose.

The new implementation and compliance structure this creates requires the expansion of organizational enablers such as more human resource staff, financial management personnel and the like to support the growing silos of implementers. When results do not match expectations, bureaucracies add new implementation instructions, which often require more staff to implement. Implementers make mistakes. Therefore the bureaucracy must expand its compliance and inspection arms to check on the implementers. As the compliance team grows, they identify more errors in the regulations and the maze of processes. Trying to help, they recommend more

regulatory control and process. Implementers become fixated on satisfying the compliance arms of their organizations, in many cases to avoid punitive results of failing to do so. At some point in this loop, the bulk of the bureaucracy is no longer focused on solving the original problem, but instead are consumed with supporting the Rules-Implementation-Compliance loop; or supporting the supporters that check the rules to support the implementers that follow the rules. Leaders must realize that their decision to create a new rule, policy, or process initiates a cascading effect that is the root cause of excessive layering and structural bloat in organizations.

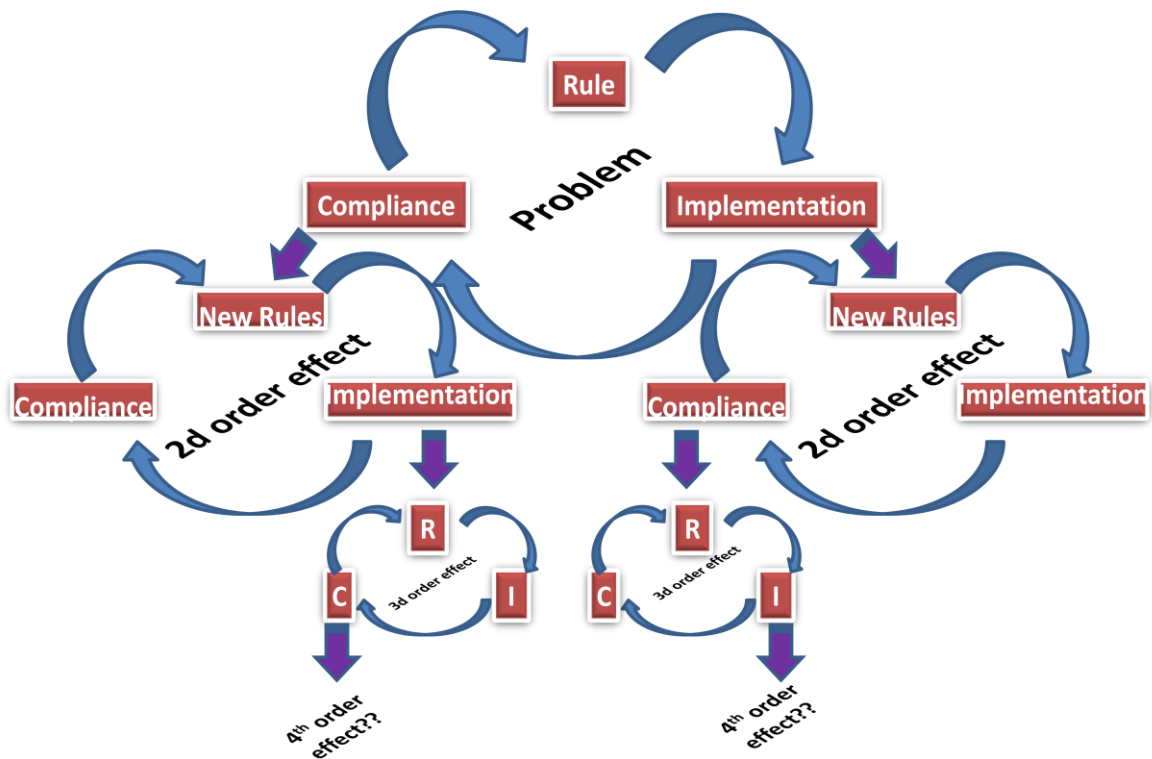


Figure 1 Rules-Implementation-Compliance Loop³⁹

Adaptive Bureaucracy

The Department of Defense is a bureaucracy within the federal bureaucracy. Bureaucracies are not only blamed for bloating structure but also for imposing an

institutional sclerosis that blocks communication, delays decision making and hinders integrated action.⁴⁰ It is easy to blame bureaucracy on our environment or resign ourselves that the Department of Defense is too entangled in a American federal system designed for hierarchy, redundancy and contradiction. Some might conclude that the bureaucratic growth and mindset are beyond their control. However, the driving force at work in the perpetual growth of a bureaucracy is poor leadership behavior. Therefore, only leaders can reverse the R-I-C loop that causes organizations to layer insidiously over time.

In his book *Simply Effective*, Ron Ashkenas contends that leaders are ultimately responsible for creating complexity in their organizations.

We create organization structures that have too many levels, redundant functions, and unclear roles. We add products, features, and services without reducing the overall portfolio of offerings or streamlining the support requirements. We build processes with too many steps and loops and missing metrics, and then don't manage them as they evolve and grow. And then we compound this complexity by giving vague assignments, not holding people accountable, miscommunicating, and avoiding conflict. The quicksand of complexity is of our own making.⁴¹

Perhaps the first step to a cure, then, is leader recognition of their role in fostering and tempering complexity and bureaucratic growth. Leaders must understand that their approach to problem solving can create immense second and third order effects that can unwittingly burden the organization they are trying to help. Leaders must become adaptive bureaucrats – selectively applying the best characteristics of bureaucracy to maintain standards and routinely divest unnecessary controls and protocols. Adaptive bureaucrats disrupt the R-I-C loop and rebalance their organizational center of gravity to

an organization grounded in the discipline of established standards but guided by a creative unifying purpose.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, in his April 2012 Mission Command White Paper, asserts that the future success of the Joint Force will depend on distributed, decentralized yet interdependent global operations enabled by a change in the “DNA of our profession of arms”.⁴² He posits that we must teach a new brand of leadership that blends the “art of command and the science of control” if we are to realize adaptable leaders and agile organizations.⁴³ In a recent Joint Forces Quarterly article, Kathleen Conley contends: General Dempsey seems to be calling for a paradigm shift in the manner in which leaders relate and adapt to their organizations and the operating environment and not the inverse.⁴⁴ While General Dempsey’s White paper suggests a new paradigm for operational leaders, it must apply to leaders serving in the generating force as well if we are to achieve lasting change to our organizational DNA. To overcome bureaucratic sclerosis in our organizations, leaders must adopt an adaptive approach to actively reconcile the tension between the need for disciplined bureaucracy to sustain standards and the desire for autonomy to spur creativity and innovation.

The Bureaucratic-Creativity Continuum

Leaders must not view their organizations in a world of absolutes. They must not overtly or unconsciously typecast their organizations as either bureaucratic or purely innovative. Doing so risks creating an imbalanced organizational culture. Leaders must clearly and selectively apply each method on a case by case basis. This mental flexibility is the essence of mission command. General Dempsey reminds us that

“mission command is not a mechanical process that the commander follows blindly. Instead, it is a continual cognitive effort to understand, adapt, and directly affect the achievement of intent.”⁴⁵ When we favor rules and controls to counter uncertainty in our environment, we may do well for those tasks and activities that require a defined standard but we also create artificial obstacles for our subordinates to the creative ideas needed in a continually changing environment. Conversely, if we favor a purely innovative culture, void of rules, process and protocol, we risk abandoning standards and metrics that are the hallmarks of efficiency, discipline and safety. Agile organizations and their leaders settle this quandary by operating on a continuum that extends from hierarchical bureaucracy on the one extreme and innovation on the other. Nimble organizations will have simultaneous sub-elements operating at varying places along the spectrum, depending on the leaders’ judgment of risk and necessary level of autonomy. There exists a natural tension between the two extremes but both conditions must co-exist for healthy organizations to thrive.

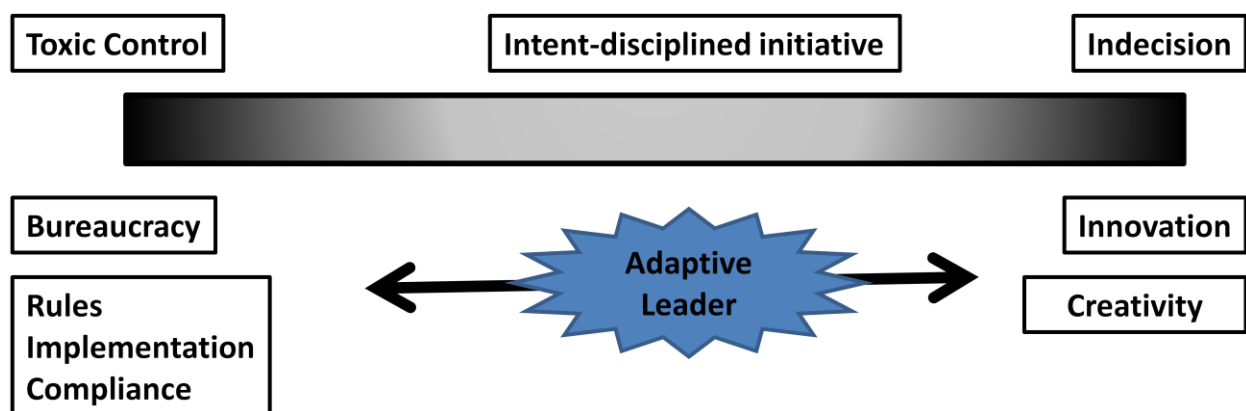


Figure 2. The Bureaucracy-Innovation Continuum

The central role of the adaptive bureaucratic leader is to operate along the continuum. The adaptive leader continually monitors and adjusts the rules rheostat and resists polarization. Toxic bureaucrats exhibit an overreliance on one dimensional authoritarian control, rules and punitive compliance. They are stuck in the comfort zone that is the RIC loop and they impose a centralized hierarchy on every pursuit. Nearly as destructive are indecisive leaders that operate entirely on the opposite end of the spectrum, failing to set clear purpose, standards or disciplined practices. They foster creativity and activity but not necessarily productive output. Leaders assist their organizations and their subordinates in adapting along the continuum by providing clear intent, then pairing talent and structure with the conditions that the environment presents. This requires that leaders know their subordinates strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes and the capacity of their organization as a whole. Rather than focus on the rules and tasks, leaders shift their focus to their people and maneuver talent on the continuum as the situation mandates. Adaptive Leaders should view bureaucracy and innovation not as competing interests in an either-or proposition but as available tools in creating the outputs required by the organization's guiding purpose.

Leaders as Good Bureaucrats

In his renowned book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins observes that ...”most organizations build bureaucratic rules to control a small percentage of people and their undisciplined behavior. This blanket approach to rule making is bad bureaucracy and it drives innovative people out of our organizations. Collins advocates “avoiding bureaucracy and hierarchy and instead creating a culture of discipline.”⁴⁶ In his study of

over 1400 companies, Collins and his team reported on the distinguishing characteristics that enabled a select few to achieve sustainable and enduring great performance. They concluded that great organizations achieve creative discipline; a balance of an innovative ethic of entrepreneurship and a culture of discipline. He called this a “magical alchemy of superior performance and sustained results.”⁴⁷

Collins suggests the *Hedgehog concept* as an essential characteristic of enduring organizational greatness. Collins cites Isaiah Berlin who relates a Greek parable to divide the world into hedgehogs and foxes.⁴⁸ Foxes are crafty but “pursue many ends at the same time and see the world in all of its complexity....they are scattered and diffused...Hedgehogs, however, simplify the complex world into a single organizing idea. “Darwin and natural selection, Marx and class struggle were both hedgehogs”, for instance.⁴⁹ Hedgehogs see the essential and ignore the rest.”⁵⁰ The Department of Defense acts more like the fox, jack of many trades but increasingly cannot afford to master any. A quick review of the National Military Strategy of 2012 reveals ten primary missions of the US Armed Forces, with number ten essentially prescribing “other operations”⁵¹. We lack a unifying hedgehog concept.

Good bureaucrats discern the essential from the important and put a disciplined framework in place to achieve the essential better than anyone else. Good bureaucrats understand what is essential for the success of their boss’s mission and include it in the determination of their hedgehog concept. Good bureaucrats have the discipline to say no to tasks and functions that do not contribute to their hedgehog. Good bureaucrats have the discipline to set clear and measurable standards and leverage the bureaucratic hierarchy to resource only the essential. Disciplined bureaucracy is a

strength of the Department of Defense when it preserves high standards for the desired ends, like the prevention of sexual assault, safety in the workplace, contract oversight, the hiring of employees or setting combat readiness metrics. It encumbers itself when it enters the R-I-C loop and prescribes the “ways” for implementation and compliance for non-essential tasks for everything from parking passes, mandating the time and place for unit physical training, and thousands of other examples just like these. Good bureaucrats operate responsibly, selectively and deliberately on the bureaucratic end of the scale, not generically or sporadically.

Leaders as Creators and Innovators

When leaders can perform as responsible bureaucrats, they earn time and resources for their organizations to move toward the creativity end of the continuum. Rather than culminating and exhausting themselves and their organizations inside of the R-I-C loop, their efforts can expand to more important pursuits such as creative problem solving and innovation. If the prospect of creativity does not light your fire, then, as the saying goes – your wood might be wet. Creativity is exciting and worth the effort, but what exactly is creativity? In his article, “Wierder than fiction: the reality and myths of creativity”, Joseph Anderson describes “three broad types of creativity – creation, synthesis and modification”. While creation is the act of making something out of nothing, he places greater importance on synthesis and modification. Synthesis is the act of relating two or more previously unrelated phenomena; like relating a shovel and a pie to create the pie server. Modification is the act of altering something that already exists so that it performs better, performs a new function, or in a new setting; like putting pontoons on an airplane.⁵² Anderson calls synthesis the “real engine of survival and

prosperity”⁵³ In order to move our employees, Soldiers and organizations into the space where synthesis and modification can thrive, they must routinely and richly connect with their environment. It is no wonder then that we hear so often that collaboration is the essence of innovation – now we know why. Collaboration with one another becomes the fertile ground where existing ideas synthesize. For instance, when a chemical company and a pharmaceutical company share research databases they expand exponentially the possibility to synthesize a new compound. They resist the bureaucratic barriers that suggest this transaction as a regulatory minefield, and toward the creative spectrum. They innovated.

Weber’s ideal bureaucracy is orderly and logical but it is insular and resists interaction. As we saw, the American federal bureaucracy is purposefully insular, often resulting in redundant silos for similar function as in the case of OMB and GAO. To foster innovation we must resist this inclination to create insularity. Adaptive organizations form effective partnerships and operate transparently in all that they do. But the magnetic pull back to our bureaucracy is great. Our egos, thirst for control, the risk of sharing intellectual property, distrust, and unnecessary rule making all cloud transparency and create obstacles to transparent collaboration. Synthesis and modification become limited if not impossible. It is not enough for leaders to proselytize about the need for innovation. Leaders must set the conditions for innovation by limiting bureaucratic barriers, freeing time and resources for employees to create, but most importantly by creating an accepting climate of partnering and transparency that breeds synthesis and modification.

Leaders as Unruly Bureaucrats

Organizational Ecology and the Art of What Not to do

Many will read the discussion of the Bureaucracy-Creativity Continuum and see fantasy. Having tried and failed to “think out of the box” many employees or military leaders may resign themselves to the simpler, slower march of mediocrity inside the overly bureaucratic machine. Others will simply vote with their feet and leave the organization. The consequences for failing to lead our organizations from bureaucracy to a bureaucracy-innovation hybrid are even more profound. As the competitive environment changes more rapidly than ever before, if we are unable or unwilling to innovate with it we risk becoming toxic, unaffordable, irrelevant or all of the above.

Anti-Fragility

Leaders that fail to actively move their organizations away from a hierarchical bureaucracy put it at risk of becoming fragile⁵⁴. In his book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb suggests that organizations become vulnerable to a complex and changing environment when they resist volatility, randomness and disorder. When we seek to “strengthen” our organizations by thickening the bureaucracy to bring order out of chaos we do a disservice to it and its people by actually weakening it. Taleb tells us that “innovation depends on antifragile tinkering, and aggressive risk bearing”.⁵⁵ He encourages constant trial and error and iterative failure to develop the anti-fragile characteristics our organizations need in today’s changing environment. In many ways this is the antithesis of the control, rules, hierarchy and order of the ideal Weberian bureaucratic form. In fact, antifragility best describes what this paper will call an unruly bureaucrat⁵⁶.

Creative Destruction⁵⁷ and the Organizational Ecocycle

The unruly bureaucrat seeks the routine creative destruction of bureaucratic processes, tasks, rules and organizations in order to free the organization to operate on the innovation end of the continuum. This requires a new leader perspective of our bureaucratic organizations. The conventional business “S curve” is a widely known and used paradigm to describe every organization’s life cycle progression from birth to maturity and decline.⁵⁸ (see Figure 3)

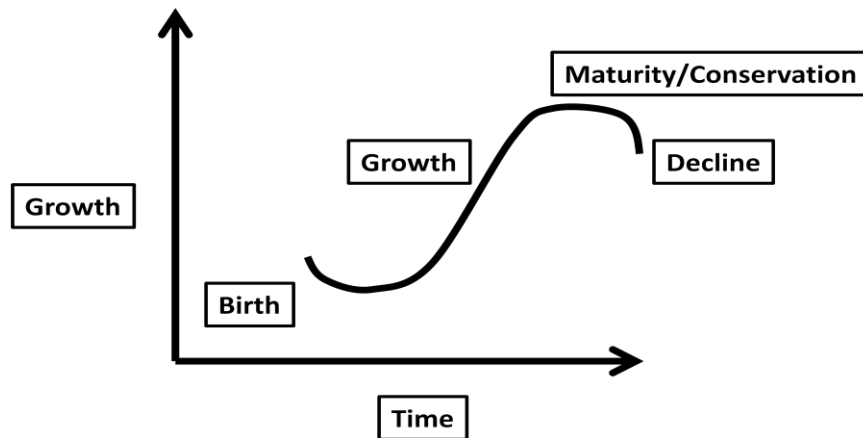


Figure 3. Conventional “Sigmoid curve” organizational lifecycle⁵⁹

What is noticeably absent in this depiction is an organization’s deliberate divestiture of any structure, function, or process over time. As the organization succeeds and matures it continues to layer itself *ad infinitum*, even after it begins to decline in efficacy. This theory helps explain in practice why the DOD is encumbered with a complex maze of layered organizations, processes and silos. We rarely get rid of a legacy program, we usually just birth a new one on top of the old. This is particularly onerous during an organizational downsizing where we may eliminate positions but

merely shift work and tasks to another employee; engendering the rally cry “more with less”. In their article *From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems*, Hurst and Zimmerman take the S curve through an entire ecocycle that includes a backloop of creative destruction and renewal.(see figure 4)

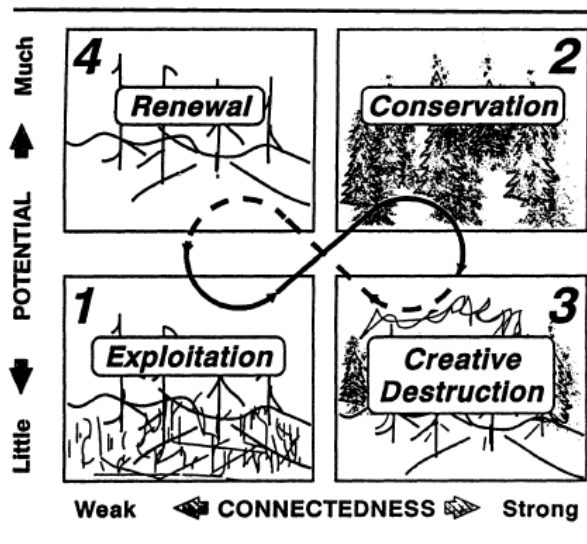


Figure 2: The birth, growth, destruction, and renewal of a forest. Adapted from Holling (1987).

Figure 4 The Organizational Ecocycle⁶⁰

This organizational model mimics the ecocycle of a forest. In short, when a gap forms in an established forest, say from a fallen tree, new resources (sun) are made available and are exploited (stage one) by a wide variety of growth. This equates to the flurry of activity in a startup company or new product development. Expansion and speed of product development are important, cost is not. Slowly the opening is dominated by a few large systems. The forest crowds, competitiveness grows and the need for efficiency increases in importance. This conservation phase (stage 2) is often

equated with the emergence of large scale hierarchical, established organizations. Organizations institutionalize their success here, sacrifice resilience and flexibility for efficiency and “become more vulnerable to change”.⁶¹ As a complex system, the forest begins to self correct and enters a third stage, that of creative destruction. In creative destruction the system is only partially destroyed by the forest fire setting the stage for renewal in phase 4. In the renewal phase, innovation can occur in the newly opened fertile ground, new ideas take root and compete for the resources available in the newly enriched soil. The initial exploitation of phase one begins anew and the cycle repeats itself.

Paradoxically, as organizations mature in phase 2 they must look for opportunities to selectively burn their underbrush. They often do not. If they do not, they continue to harden, become fragile and are eventually destroyed by a crisis. To avoid this overcrowding and fragility the unruly bureaucrat must actively seek opportunity to routinely burn and harvest the *underbrush* and iteratively move their organization into a phase three controlled burn. The identification and removal of task, structure, rules and process that is no longer value-added is leaders’ business of the highest order. Through creative destruction leaders create the open space in their organization that encourages the growth and competition of ideas and the renewal of the organization. Imagine a leader that spends equal time understanding the capacity of his employees and daily or weekly asking them what they should stop doing, then making them stop doing it - this marks the arrival of the unruly bureaucratic leader.⁶²

Leaders as Simplifiers

When leaders can decipher their hedgehog concept and practice systems thinking to see the linkages in their systems; they can then clearly prioritize functions for elimination. Simply put, if a function does not align with the greater purpose, or replicates a function found elsewhere in the system a leader now has context to simplify his organization. In his book Simply Effective, Ron Ashkenas goes further to suggest that it is a leader imperative to “make it easier for their people” by deliberately identifying and eliminating the sources of complexity. In a refreshing reversal from the insular and stereotypical bureaucratic mindset of protecting function and structure, Ashkenas suggests that to serve their people and organization, leaders must become adept at simplifying structure, reducing product proliferation, streamlining processes and curbing their own complexity causing behaviors.⁶³ Leaders must actively pursue the art of what not to do.⁶⁴

Conclusion

These are genuinely exciting times for everyone serving in the Department of Defense. Congress and the Executive branch have provided the gift of a burning platform in the form of a relatively sudden reduction in funding for 2013 through sequestration and a promise of future reduction in the out years of the FYDP. With an extended multi-year hiring freeze in place, the conditions are set to recreate our organizations and how they operate. Everyone in the Department of Defense has a choice to make. Leaders can sit on the sidelines, take their medicine and complain that the bureaucratic system is immovable. Or they can begin to transform how they think and act. General Dempsey’s Mission Command White Paper gives us a simple

framework – provide clear intent and lead subordinates to operate from disciplined initiative at the point of execution. Start by viewing your organization as a bureaucratic continuum, not a static object that defends against its external environment. Yearn to innovate on the creative side of the spectrum and to get your people there too. Collaborate with your people, your partners and your boss to establish essential priorities; then enter a burn phase to clear the legacy Rules-Implementation processes and Compliant procedures (R-I-C) that no longer support your essential tasks. Then repeat this every month. Resist your control instincts as you consider new rules, process, or structure. If you have the courage to proceed you will show others the essence of adaptive leadership. General Dempsey's call to action is all of the intellectual top cover that you need.

Endnotes

¹ Lance M. Bacon, "Cutting Half an Army" *Army Times*, March 11, 2013 taken from daily ARCIC Press Highlights forwarded by Army War College faculty.

² Overhead calculated by dividing 2010 DOD base Budget (\$530B) into the Defense Business Board estimate on overhead costs (\$200B) equaling 38%. These figures taken from Defense Business Board report summary FY11-08; "Corporate Downsizing Applications for DOD", slide 6. Also see Marshall A.Hanson, "Defense Budget is being scrubbed in search for savings," *The Officer* 86 no.4 (Sep/Oct 2010): 20. Taken from a ProQuest search on 14 March 13

³ George Melloan, "Government to the Rescue," a book review of *The Betrayal of the American Dream* by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele; *Wall Street Journal*; Tuesday, July 31, 2013, p A11.

⁴ My first exposure to the idea of *creative destruction* is from David K.Hurst and Brenda J. Zimmerman. *From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems*; *Journal of Management Inquiry* 1994; 3;339-354; downloaded from <http://jmi.sagepub.com> at UNIV REGINA Library on May 4, 2010.

⁵ General Robert W. Cone introduced me to Max Weber in an e-mail correspondence dated 24 Oct 2012.

⁶ Max Weber, essays in Sociology, trans. and ed. By H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) pp 214-216, 228-229, 231-234, Copyright 1946, 1958 by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Used by permission of Oxford University Press in the compilation: Julie Dolan and David H. Rosenbloom, *Representative Bureaucracy* (Armonk, New York: M.E.Sharpe Inc, 2003) 8.

⁷ Ibid.

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⁹ Harro M.Hopfl, "Post-bureaucracy and Weber's "modern" bureaucrat," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 19, no. 1 (2006): pp8-9. Emerald Group Publishing, Limited, Bradford, UK. ProQuest Research Library 2013 (Feb 2013).

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¹¹ This paragraph taken exactly(as quoted) or in paraphrase from Harro M.Hopfl, "Post-bureaucracy and Weber's "modern" bureaucrat," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 19, no. 1 (2006): Emerald Group Publishing, Limited, Bradford, UK. ProQuest Research Library 2013 (Feb 2013).

¹² Brian Friel, "It takes a Bureaucracy," *Government Executive* 36 (Dec 2004): 21; ProQuest Research Library, pg. 83; James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It* (USA: Basic Books, 1989), 334.

¹³ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It* (USA: Basic Books, 1989), 335.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fred W. Riggs, "Bureaucracy and the Constitution," *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1994) ProQuest Research Library pg. 65

¹⁶ Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 236.

¹⁷ Riggs, "Bureaucracy and the Constitution," ProQuest Research Library pg. 65

¹⁸ Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 239.

¹⁹ E. J. Dionne Jr., "Political Hacks vs Bureaucrats, Can't Public Servants Get Some Respect," *The Brookings Review* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2001) ProQuest Research Library pg. 8.

²⁰ Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 242.

²¹ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It* (USA: Basic Books, 1989), 243-244, quote from p 244. Here he references Robert J. Art, "Congress and the Defense Budget: Enhancing Policy Oversight", *Political Science Quarterly* 100 (1985): 227-248,

²² Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 258.

²³ Ibid, 257.

²⁴ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It* (USA: Basic Books, 1989), 257-258. This entire paragraph taken from this source either word for word or in paraphrase.

²⁵ Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 259. Here he references Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Counting our Blessings* (Boston: Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1980), 117-118.

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²⁷ Francis E. Rourke, "Bureaucracy in the American Constitutional Order," *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (Summer, 1987), 217-232; published by The Academy of Political Science; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2151350> accessed on 03/03/2113.

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²⁹ Wilson, *Bureaucracy; What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It*, 283.

³⁰ Taken from the Methodology Tab at <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=48>

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³² Overhead calculated by dividing 2010 DOD base Budget (\$530B) into the Defense Business Board estimate on overhead costs (\$200B) equaling 38%. These figures taken from Defense Business Board report summary FY11-08; "Corporate Downsizing Applications for DOD", slide 6. Also see Marshall A.Hanson, "Defense Budget is being scrubbed in search for savings," *The Officer* 86 no.4 (Sep/Oct 2010): 20. Taken from a ProQuest search on 14 March 13

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³⁷ Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought – How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...And Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 26-27/602 on iBook format.

³⁸ Phillip K. Howard, *The Death of Common Sense* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 1994, 2011) Chapter I, p 106-108/443 on iBook format.

³⁹ William D. Eggers and John O'Leary, *If We Can Put a Man On The Moon; Getting Things Done in Government* (Boston, MA; Harvard Business Press, 2009). This book provided the conceptual underpinnings for the R-I-C Loop. Notably, Eggers' and O'Leary's seven deadly traps point to the dissonance between the idea and design of legislation and the unintended consequences during implementation and oversight.

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⁴² Dempsey, Martin E. "Mission Command White Paper" 3 April 2012, 6.

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⁴⁴ Conley, Kathleen. "Operationalizing Mission Command: Leveraging Theory to Achieve Capability," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (January 2013) 1. I used her suggestion of a new leadership framework as a method to achieve agility to shape the structure of this paper.

⁴⁵ Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," 4-5.

⁴⁶ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001). accessed on 30 March 2013 on iBook format p 277-278.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 278. The idea of a bureaucracy and innovation continuum had its genesis in Collin's construct of Good to Great Creative Discipline on p278.

⁴⁸ Collins, *Good to Great*, 90.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Good to Great*, 90-91.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Good to Great*, 91.

⁵¹ Barack Obama, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: The White House, January 2012), 4-6.

⁵² Joseph V. Anderson, "Weirder than Fiction: The reality and myths of creativity," *Academy of Management Executive* 6, no.4 (1992): 77-78 as republished in the USAWC Strategic Thinking selected readings core curriculum 10-23 August 2012.

⁵³ Anderson, 78.

⁵⁴ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile : Things That Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012) 40-47. **Nadim Matta**, President, Rapid Results Institute; Partner, Schaffer Consulting recommended I reference Mr Taleb's book during our discussion on 12 March 2013. For further discussion of fragility see p 68-69 of the iBook version.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mr Marc Princen, President of Diversified Brands at Merck and Co Inc shared the notion of "unruliness" to foster innovative thought during a conversation in February 2013.

⁵⁷ J. A. Schumpeter , *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 339. Referenced by Hurst and Zimmerman who attribute the notion of "creative destruction" to Joseph A. Schumpeter.

⁵⁸ David K. Hurst, and Brenda J. Zimmerman, "From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 3 (1994): 339-354. References the conventional "S curve" in C.Handy, "The age of paradox," (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ Charles Handy, *The Age of Paradox* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994), 49. This diagram is an adaptation of The Sigmoid Curve described by Handy.

⁶⁰ David K. Hurst, and Brenda J. Zimmerman, "From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems," 341.

⁶¹ Ibid, 345.

⁶² The entire model of the ecocycle and its relation to an organization taken from: David K. Hurst, and Brenda J. Zimmerman, "From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 3 (1994).

⁶³ Ashkenas, *Simply Effective: How to Cut Through Complexity in your Organization and Get Things Done*, Preface, 27, 55, 81, and 111.

⁶⁴ Colonel Wayne Green, "Turning Silos into Cell Phone Towers," Article For Publication (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, February 2013), 5.