# Order Without Design

*Information Production and Policy Making*

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CHAPTER 10

# Bureaucratic Analysts and Their Work

BUREAUCRATIC ANALYSTS have been portrayed as experts who use well-defined methods to produce analyses of policy problems (MacRae, 1981; Meltsner, 1980; Nagel, 1980). The primary purpose of their work according to this description is to help policy makers make decisions. Their analyses provide information about policy problems and may suggest possible solutions.

This description of the role makes it sound simple. It isn't. One set of complications is created by a professional ideal of objectivity. Under any circumstances this ideal is impossible to fulfill. An indeterminate amount of personal or organizational bias accompanies any analysis (Benveniste, 1972; Dahl, 1963). Additional tension is created by the need to respond to organizational pressures for the presentation of information with a specific bias. Analysts may use social science methods to reduce the subjective bias of their analyses. The organization, however, also imposes constraints on time and other resources. It specifies procedures to be followed and roles to be filled. These create incentives that favor some perspectives over others. This is an inevitable source of bias. Striking a balance between these two pressures is an important issue for the field of public policy (Meltsner, 1972; Schott, 1976; Wilensky, 1964).

While the balancing of these contrary pulls is important to the work of bureaucratic analysts, it is only one of the complications of the role they play in the policy-making arena. As the preceding chapters have shown, analysts not only provide technical and analytical information to help policy makers make deci-

sions, but also develop interpretations of policy issues and negotiate agreement on these interpretations. Implicit in the negotiation process is the fact that they work between organizations. The agreements they negotiate are not only with representatives of other organizations, but also with the officials of their own organization. In a sense, they represent the interests of other organizations to their own organization and thus are boundary spanners as well as negotiators. This chapter discusses these two roles.

## Bureaucratic Analysts as Negotiators

When analysts write papers, they produce interpretations of issues. They do this by including the facts and concerns that they see as relevant to understanding the issue they are writing about. Their choice of facts and concerns is determined by the way they think about and understand the issue. Bureaucratic analysts are constrained in their choice of facts and concerns in two ways that more independent analysts are not. First, bureaucratic analysts are members of organizations and are obliged to promote and protect the interests their organizations represent. In many cases the amount of choice the analysts have is very limited. Positions the organization has taken in the past on this issue or the preferences of an organizational official may almost completely determine what position the analyst takes. The second constraint is that analysts have to agree about the interpretation with other analysts representing other interests.

As a result of these constraints, much of the bureaucratic analyst's skill lies not in the choice of interpretations but in the ability to negotiate agreements on a given issue: to give up as much but not more than necessary; to know when agreement is really important; to protect the most crucial elements of the interests he or she represents. Negotiating these agreements requires both expertise and skill in using that expertise in order to achieve the best possible outcome.

### Expertise

Three kinds of expertise are necessary for bureaucratic analysts to perform their jobs effectively. They are knowledge about



the position being represented, about the substance of the issue being written about, and about the organizational context in which the work is being performed.

*Knowledge of the Position.* Negotiating for a position entails understanding what the position is. This seems straightforward. But knowing a position is not necessarily straightforward. Positions can have many nuances. The Department of Energy did, for example, support granting the right of eminent domain to coal slurry pipelines. It did not, however, support all legislation that granted this right; there were other aspects of the coal slurry issue to consider. In fact, the year before the testimony described in Chapter 4 was written, legislation that would have granted eminent domain to the pipelines was opposed by DOE because some of the other provisions were considered so rigid that they would have inhibited the ability of the pipelines to develop as a means of transporting coal. Thus, even if you can state the position very succinctly (e.g., we want to increase the likelihood of coal slurry development), you cannot translate that statement very easily into what positions a policy analyst should take on specific aspects of specific papers. Even in this case, the statement of the position is overly simplified, for the position was not to support the development of coal slurry pipelines at all costs. Other concerns had to be taken into consideration, such as the effect of the development on other forms of coal transportation or on the future development of coal as an energy source. This kind of knowledge develops over time as analysts become acquainted with the nuances of the issue, the interactions among these nuances, and the overall positions of the organization they represent.

*Substantive Knowledge of the Issue.* Bureaucratic analysts need substantive knowledge of the issue they are writing about. Substantive knowledge increases the analyst's ability to develop a better understanding of the issue. The more knowledge one has about the facts and concerns relevant to one's interests in the issue, the more likely one is to be able to include them in and thereby strengthen an interpretation.

Substantive knowledge is also useful in the negotiating process. It influences whose arguments are attended to and sometimes even who is included in the process. People who have

little knowledge tend not to be taken seriously. For example, early in the process of writing the National Energy Transportation Study, one analyst was discounted as a possible contributor because he "didn't know much of anything." The people making this claim supported it by referring to an incident in which the analyst had said that water wasn't a problem for coal slurry pipeline production, which showed that the analyst indeed knew very little about the matter. Even though little of the National Energy Transportation Study dealt with coal slurry pipelines, the incident was used to discount any contribution to the report this analyst might make (field notes, 5/29/80).

Substantive knowledge can also help analysts expand their influence. People who have lots of substantive knowledge are generally respected, and their contributions to discussions are taken seriously. Analysts with particularly well-developed expertise may be invited to participate in writing or commenting on a report even when their organization is not on the concurrence list (Gregory's activities provide an example of this in week 5, Appendix B).

Arguments about substance are part of the negotiating process, and substantive expertise can be decisive in a dispute. For instance, if another analyst is arguing a point that you can prove is wrong, the point is unlikely to be included in the paper. Similarly, having more information than other analysts do can increase the likelihood of including a point that you want to make. Having pieces of information that other analysts are not aware of and have not taken into account in their arguments is particularly effective.

Substantive knowledge is also important in more mundane ways. For instance, in Chapter 5 there is an incident in which Gregory found a report on a topic related to his methanol report. Using information from that report saved a fair amount of money, which he then spent to expand other parts of his report. His substantive knowledge of the issue area beyond what he strictly needed to know in order to coordinate the methanol study helped him make the connection between the report he found and his own study.

*Organizational Knowledge.* Bureaucratic analysts need both knowledge of their own organization and of the organization of



the analysts they deal with. They clearly need to work within the rules and norms of their own organization. They also can use these rules to their advantage. Deadlines or demands superiors make for accountability can be used to make claims and gain concessions in the substance of papers. Similarly, by knowing the rules and norms of the organizations of analysts they deal with, analysts can better judge the claims other analysts make and how far they can reasonably push them.

Bureaucratic analysts can use knowledge of their own organization and its procedures to insist upon the inclusion or exclusion of information and to increase their control over the paper-writing process. They often use organizational or procedural claims to influence the substance of agreements. The claim may simply be that "my boss won't buy this" or "this will never fly in my organization." A more complicated and compelling version of this claim involves relating other activities such as lawsuits, regulatory hearings, budget requests, or other reports that contradict some part of the interpretation being proposed. In this case, the analyst claims responsibility for maintaining consistency and insists that upper-level officials won't sign off on the paper in this form because of the inconsistency it would produce. (Of course, the analyst will, in all likelihood, be the person who informs the officials of the inconsistency; failure to do so would constitute a neglect of the analyst's duties.) Clearly the more extensive the analyst's knowledge of the activities and the predispositions of the organization's members, the more effective he or she can be in making these claims.

Knowledge of organizational procedure can also be used to increase control over the paper-writing process. This is presumably not an end in itself, but is undertaken to influence the substance of a paper. The railroad revenue adequacy case described in Chapter 4 provides some good examples of this use of procedural knowledge. The analysts from the Economic Regulatory Administration used their organization's need to account for money spent on consultants to gain greater control over the reports. Specifically, they claimed that they could not spend the money unless they obtained agreement from the other offices to use the information that would result from spending the money. The analysts from the policy office and the Office of the General

Counsel relied on their knowledge of procedure in dealing with this claim. First, they took a chance based on knowledge of their own organizations and past experience with the Economic Regulatory Administration that the claim being made was not strictly true. Second, they revived a letter written by a previous undersecretary that outlined the relationship among the three offices for producing papers of the sort they were currently working on. Some of this battle for control of the paper-writing process was waged on substantive grounds, but much of it was on procedural grounds. Analysts ill prepared to fight the procedural battle would have lost control of the substance of the paper.

Knowledge, both specific and general, about the organizations analysts deal with is also useful. As shown in the above example, it is helpful in discerning when other analysts are making credible claims and when their claims should be rejected. It is also useful in much more mundane circumstances. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 5, the information useful for doing one's job is not always readily available. People seldom refuse to give information, but they may simply not advertise its existence. Being a good analyst often involves being part detective. Being aware of the normal procedures and of deviations from them can provide clues as to the probable existence of information and where it is likely to be found. Daniel used this kind of knowledge in dealing with the report that was sometimes sent to him and sometimes sent elsewhere. His knowledge of the standard commenting procedure led him to realize when he first received the report that it was not the first time it had been sent out for comments. He was then able to find out who it had been sent to and keep track of it from then on. Though this is a trivial example, it is one that is repeated often and becomes important because of the number of times it occurs. The knowledge of the procedure required is not particularly elaborate or esoteric. What is important is an understanding of what is normal and a sensitivity to when and how deviations from this standard occur.

Use of procedures can also be important in encouraging people to find something they can agree to. For instance, in the National Energy Transportation Study, the Energy Secretary's special assistant was called at one point to put pressure on some of



the participants to come to agreement. This is a ploy that cannot be used often, but can be effective when used appropriately.

*Skill*

Bureaucratic analysts use the expertise described above in negotiating. They use the knowledge to argue their positions persuasively and to compel their opponents to relinquish their positions without jeopardizing the possibility of reaching an agreement. They must be able to judge when they have asked for enough, too much, or too little and, likewise, when their opponents have asked for enough, too much, or too little. To be able to make such judgments, analysts must understand their own and their opponents' positions and have the substantive and procedural knowledge to understand what is reasonable. Thus, successful negotiating involves the use of the three forms of expertise.

Having the expertise, however, does not mean that an analyst will know how to negotiate interpretations. Negotiating involves combining this knowledge into smooth execution. While specific pieces of information can be learned through courses and books or from explanations of bosses and other analysts, learning to use the expertise is a different process. Negotiating interpretations of issues is a skill, which, like many skills, is more readily learned through practice than through verbal exchange (Polanyi, 1962).

A skill is a sequence of behavior in which each action is conditional upon the previous action or state. The skilled performer makes choices about what action to take next, but the choices are based on knowledge that is tacit and are not necessarily conscious (Nelson and Winter, 1982). Tacit knowledge and nondeliberative choices are important features of a skill. The freedom from conscious processing of information is what allows for a skilled performance.

Take driving a car as an example of a skill. The driver shifts gears as the car accelerates and decelerates. The appropriate gear is determined by what gear the car is currently in and whether the car is increasing or decreasing in speed. This is a programmatic sequence and usually occurs without any explicit knowledge or conscious choice except, of course, in the case of

people who are learning to drive. Skilled drivers shift at the appropriate time without being aware that they should or even that they are doing it. They may simultaneously be listening or talking, reading street signs, and paying attention to traffic. It is, in fact, this ability to drive without paying conscious attention to the mechanics of driving that separates skilled from unskilled drivers.

As bureaucratic analysts write papers that contain negotiated agreements, they are practicing a skill. Writing policy papers, first of all, is programmatic. Actions taken are conditioned by the preceding action or state. As shown in Chapter 7, the steps taken in writing a paper are essentially reactive. The context defines the next appropriate step. In addition, there is a predictable pattern of acceleration of demands and pressures for agreement. Demands tend to be softly spoken at the beginning of the process. Pressures for acceleration tend to increase as work on the paper continues and as deadlines draw nearer.

Negotiating agreements also involves making nondeliberative choices on the basis of tacit or unspoken knowledge. As in the driving example, while some choices are very deliberate, many are not. Analysts depend on their tacit knowledge of communication, human relations, and the organizational and political context in order to make such choices as what words to use in an interpretation, how to understand what other analysts are saying, how much pressure to put on another analyst, and how hard to press for one's own position. In general, analysts behave in such a way that the negotiation continues without their being able to articulate the ways in which they are making that possible.

When a policy paper is written (or negotiated), many people with various levels of this skill perform simultaneously. The driving analogy is, again, apt. People can perform as drivers or as negotiators without having much skill. Some people never acquire much skill, and others seem to be born with it. Most people, however, learn it by practicing, and they get better with practice. Those people with more skill tend to achieve their ends more surely and more easily. It is also true, however, that no matter how much skill one has, one is dependent on other drivers or negotiators, since they form part of the context in which one must operate.



### *Bureaucratic Analysts as Boundary Spanners*

The emphasis placed on the role of bureaucratic analysts as negotiators and as representatives of interests may encourage some to think about them as "hired guns." Bureaucratic analysts do represent their office's positions. There is an important distinction, however, between what they do and the work of a "hired gun." Bureaucratic analysts do not just represent their organization in negotiations; they also play a role in developing the position they represent.

When the office has not taken a position on an issue before, a bureaucratic analyst's role in developing a position may be large. Analysts can also influence the organization's position when that position is well established. Sometimes they do this by gathering information and doing analyses that lead them to different conclusions from those the organization has supported in the past or those their superiors currently support. Sometimes they come to new conclusions through the negotiating process. They may be persuaded by the arguments other analysts make, or they may become convinced that the best agreement they can negotiate entails some change in the organization's position. It is sometimes hard to separate these; what analysts believe is the best possible agreement has a lot to do with what they think about the issue.

Whether analysts change their minds about the issue because of arguments other analysts make or simply think that they have the best possible agreement, they need to convince their superiors to sign off on the paper. This means convincing their superiors that the way the issue is presented in the report is appropriate for their organization. In so doing, they are in the position of representing the interests of other organizations to their superiors. It is this particular feature of the job that makes bureaucratic analysts boundary spanners as well as negotiators.

The need for boundary spanning comes from the requirement for agreement or concurrence on the papers bureaucratic analysts write. Since almost all papers require this agreement and different offices and departments have the lead or the main responsibility for producing a report, the offices and departments are in a symbiotic interdependence (Scott, 1981). Every organiza-

tion needs the cooperation of other organizations either now or in the near future. While department heads and other high-level officials do talk with one another, they do not have the time to work out detailed agreements on the numerous issues they are responsible for. They must rely on the analysts to do this. The analysts have both the time and the expertise to perform this role. Thus, they become liaisons between the interdependent organizations.

Thompson has noted that when boundary-spanning jobs occur in environments that are heterogeneous and shifting, they require the exercise of discretion (1967, p. 111). This characterization fits the environment in which bureaucratic analysts work. They write different kinds of papers on various aspects of the issues they are responsible for. The audience for the papers and the analysts and offices involved in writing the papers change. Discretion is required for dealing appropriately with these variations. Analysts must be able to make choices they can be reasonably sure will be supported by their superiors, either because a choice is consistent with organizational policy or because they can convince their superiors that it is the right choice to make. The three kinds of expertise discussed above are important to ensure this outcome.

## *Conclusion*

Traditionally, bureaucratic analysts have been seen as people who provide analyses to help policy makers understand and solve policy problems. This role is in itself quite complicated (Meltsner, 1976). When bureaucratic analysts are viewed as being involved in the process of developing interpretations of issues, it becomes clear that the work they do involves not only being good analysts but also being skilled negotiators and intrepid boundary spanners. Currently, even those analysts who are trained in public policy schools are trained primarily in analytical techniques. Their training should also acquaint them with the role that they will play in the bureaucracy and should give them experience to prepare for this role.

The emphasis placed on the role of organizational interests and on the production of interpretations rather than solutions



may appear to be contrary to training in analytical and statistical techniques. It is not. Analysts as negotiators and boundary spanners need to be able to develop their own analyses. They should, at least, be able to understand when statistical and other forms of data are being appropriately used. When they oversee or review studies in which data are gathered and analyzed, they should understand how to minimize subjective bias, and they should understand the consequences of the choices made about methods. Some analysts need only be concerned with such narrow technical issues. Most analysts, however, are and want to be in positions that require a broader range of expertise and skill. For these analysts an understanding of the substantive aspects of an issue and of the methods for gathering and analyzing data are necessary, but not sufficient.

Training in and an appreciation of the areas of expertise and skill discussed in this chapter are required for adequate preparation for the tasks bureaucratic analysts engage in. Currently, people develop the skill and expertise principally on the job. They have to in order to do a good job. Some knowledge and skill can only be developed in this way. A fine-grained sense of the organization's position on a particular issue, for instance, is very difficult to achieve outside of the organization. The next chapter discusses this feature of the work and the role that organizing plays in providing opportunities to learn. Much of what is necessary for being an effective analyst can, however, be learned outside the organization. Basic understandings about how organizations operate, about how to represent an interest, and about how to negotiate agreements out of conflict can be usefully discussed and practiced in classrooms and other settings outside the organization. Bureaucratic analysts develop these skills because the work they do requires them to. Training could enhance their effectiveness in the practice of these skills.

The problem-solving perspective emphasizes training and selecting analysts who are competent in the technical aspects of policy analysis. The interpretive perspective suggests that the abilities necessary for being a good bureaucratic analyst are much broader than that. An understanding of this perspective could help schools train analysts to be better prepared for this work. It would prepare them to be more effective negotiators

and boundary spanners and also to expect the sort of work that most of them will, in fact, be doing. This will increase the attractiveness of the work for some and decrease it for others. On the whole, it should increase the value placed on the work by those who opt for these jobs and decrease disillusionment and cynicism.