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# Preface

Since the original publication of *Public Administration: Social Change and Adaptive Management* in 1988 and subsequent editions in 2003 and 2010, many of the details of public administration theory and practice have changed. However, the basic interpretive themes we addressed from the first edition have remained remarkably resilient. While these themes are reflected in different substantive concerns and in evolving ideas about how to conduct the activities of public administration, the administrative swamp metaphor still aptly captures the tension between the ideal of rational processes and the reality of the social and political world in which American public administration takes place today.

In our democratic society, citizens expect government to pursue goals and to address problems with clear and successful measures. Public administration is traditionally viewed as the application of rational processes to the accomplishment of governmental agency missions. In reality, however, complex forces make the rational pursuit of goals difficult. Many public problems are intractable. The competing interests and forces surrounding public agencies make administrative life uncertain. Consequently, public agencies and administrators find themselves in the administrative swamp. Management of public agencies is a high-risk endeavor. This book deals with the reality of public administration and contrasts it with the unreal expectations that American society often has of public organizations.

American public administration is practiced in a complex social, economic, and political environment. The constraining effects of the environment, along with limits on human rationality, lead the practice of public administration to be more fluid than concrete. Public administration and administrators need to be inventive, flexible, and adaptive. Planning, resource allocation, and human capital management rely more upon intuitive and contingent approaches than traditional public administration

theory postulates. Public administration is a living experience in which constant personal and organizational adjustments are made as public policy is implemented in a changing and unsure setting.

Public administration also has come to be increasingly important in the general governance of our society. In many respects, the manager, who is at the center of the policy process and at the service delivery level, is the final decision maker and interpreter of policy. In short, public administrators often determine what the policy actually means. We also recognize that public agencies and administrators increasingly work in partnership with others in achieving their goals. Governance involves private sector organizations, nonprofits, and governmental agencies working together to deliver the services the public expects.

In attempting to capture the reality of public administration, this book examines the context, major actors, activities, and issues that surround the field. In the first two chapters, we address the context of public administration. Chapter 1 looks at the field of public administration and the way people have conceptualized it, with an emphasis on the need for collective human effort to accomplish the objectives of administration. Chapter 2 examines the specific American political context. The effects of imperfect political pluralism and the political aspects of administration are used to contrast public administration with administration in general.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the organizations and people doing the work of public administration. Chapter 3 focuses on bureaucracy, the dominant form of organization in public administration. Bureaucracy as an ideal, rational form of organization for accomplishing any goal is contrasted with the reality of bureaucratic behavior. Criticisms of bureaucracy and suggestions for reform are examined to provide an understanding of the prospects for success. Chapter 4 deals with the individual members of the bureaucracy and the factors that motivate them. Theories of organization, from the perspective of the role of the individual in organizations, are used to illustrate problems in organizational behavior.

Chapter 5 examines the major activities of bureaucracies in applying and managing resources in the execution of their responsibilities. In particular, we look at the ways bureaucracies use planning, budgeting, and evaluation to facilitate administra-