THE MYTH OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS UTILITY IN GOVERNMENT

by

Brenda Douglas

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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THE MYTH OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS UTILITY IN GOVERNMENT

BY

BRENDA DOUGLAS

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis is a myth in and of itself. For some time I floundered over what I would write. All I knew was that I would write something that had to do with organizational behaviour in governments. Having spent the last dozen years of my career with the City of Winnipeg, I wanted to share my experiences and learn more about the issues facing government today and tomorrow.

Now that this work is complete, it is no longer a myth. There are several persons for whom I am thankful in helping me dispel this myth. To begin, I would like to thank Professor Bob Adie, who from the first time we met to discuss my thesis, knew the direction in which I was heading, but who let me draw the map in getting there.

Special thanks to Joan Anderton, Director of Corporate Services with the City of Winnipeg, who had the courage to hire me, and who always seems to have the energy to challenge me. Also, special thanks to Monique Gendre, for her outstanding technological skills that made this paper readable.

A warm thanks to my long time friend, Deb Maluk, who often listened to my woes, ideas, and several readings of draft chapters over the telephone.

Finally, I owe many heartfelt thanks to my partner, Robert, for supporting and tolerating me in any effort I undertake, and for always teaching me the difference between reality and myth.

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Mr. John Ivan Prosken.

INTRODUCTION

> Myth is, in fact, not only a transient but a permanent element in human culture. Man is not exclusively a rational animal, he is and remains a mythical animal. Myth is part and parcel of human nature. (Ernest Carrier, 1945)

Everyday of our lives, from the time we awake, to the time we sleep, in the way we work, and in the way we view the events and people around us, we follow myths. We are "mythical animals", driven by forces we rarely realize, let alone, question. As you read this paper, stop for a moment to consider what myths you follow; in the way you work, the clothes you wear, and the thoughts you think. Myths often determine what we do and how we do it.

Myths are interpretations of events, history and people that explain and justify our actions and ideas. By their very nature, myths are partial explanations of reality, our reality, each and every one of us. They are subjective and biased. Myths are like stories about social phenomena such as history, events or individuals that describe the origin of social units, give accounts of how institutions were introduced and how specific customs were crystallized. *To this end,* myths are an integral part of culture, human personalities and social interaction.

Myths, consequently, play an important role in the formulation of organizational culture. Although there is no common definition of an organizational culture, many researchers agree that it generally represents a set of important understandings (often an oral tradition) that members of an organization or group hold in common. (Wilkins 1983, DiTomaso, 1987, Alvesson, 1990) Such understandings include their behaviour and practices, and their beliefs, ideas and attitudes. Wilkins contends that

while some organizational cultures approximate community-like ethnographic cultures, many others are socially fragmented. Nonetheless, there is a range of organizations for which the primary organizational culture is a dominant form of control. (Wilkins, 1983)

This is true for public sector organizations. Various departments differ in their views of social reality, and uphold different meanings for behaviours, and events. (Jamison 1985) Despite these differences between, or among similar organizational cultures, they appear to always have one thing in common. This commonality is the existence of myths. The purposes they serve, by what means, and which ones should be followed, remain unclear. They do appear, however, to serve some purpose which is vital to the very existence of a culture's survival.

> Since the concept of organization implies that subparts can act in a unified way in the interests of the collective, it follows that when an organizational myth arises, it may provide the "social glue" necessary for the entity to act as a whole. (Smith and Simmons, p.377)

One such myth that seems to provide the "social glue" for Canadian society and its government, is the myth of democracy. Despite its many meanings, democracy is a form of government **by** the people **for** the people. **By** the people, means government is legitimized by the governed through elections and townhall meetings, while, **for** the people, means that a legitimate state cannot become an instrument for personal gain. This understanding of democracy is the foundation on which our society, our government, and our public institutions have evolved and survived.

Democracy, as a myth, however, is non-existent. Government is not legitimized by all citizens, and many **do use it** for personal gain. "A society in which a rich minority is able to command more and more of the society's resources while the vast majority is becoming poor and less able to participate

is obviously not being governed for the people." (Barnet, p.20) If democracy is a myth, and it does not truly exist in society, what purpose does it serve?

In The Republic, Plato states that myths are noble lies that justify arrangements of power in society. It goes back to the story or myth of the creation of the state and a social contract that cannot be verified except by its presence today, in which men surrendered, delegated, or were tricked into giving up their power. "From this myth follow conclusions about the role of the state, the relationship of individuals to it, and the need to preserve or change the status quo, depending on the version of the myth being recounted." (Institute of Intergovernment Relations, p.9)

The myth of democracy in our current society in general and our government, in particular, stems from this myth. It is often assumed, that myth creates and determines the behaviour of individuals and groups. In reference to organizational behaviour, myth is seen as influencing the performance of the individuals, and the overall organization, including the organization's ability to survive or fail.

As government experiences increasing public pressure to perform in a responsible and efficient manner, it seems timely to take an in-depth look at myth's purpose, specifically, its utility in government.

This paper is an examination of the utility of the myth of democracy in government. It is a descriptive exploration of democracy as a myth, whose central thesis is that myth serves several uses for government, including; obtaining agreement, clarifying purpose, and assisting leaders in facing future challenges. The paper examines myths by looking at their role and formulation in cultures, the

theories of their character, and their general uses. A framework is developed to explore democracy, as well as some of its subparts; the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility, the convention of Political Neutrality and the organizational theory of empowerment. As myths and submyths, their pervasiveness, utility and future within society, are analysed throughout the paper.

The argument put forward in this paper it not intended to denounce myths, or discredit democracy, rather, it is intended to demonstrate the importance of democracy, based on myths' legitimacy and its legitimation function, versus the obscure faith on which we often accept it.

The myth of democracy, and its submyths, have a number of utilities that are essential for the continued operation of government. The following chapters explain why those utilities are essential for our government's survival.

Chapter 1 defines the concept of myth. It examines the ways in which the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology view myths, and their meaning in understanding human and organizational behaviour. In so doing, the chapter develops a framework of the common characteristics and utility of myth, namely, its ability to; create social structures, explain events, maintain tradition, unite masses of people, bring about change, and sustain order.

Chapter 2 defines democracy and identifies it as a myth. It draws parallels between democracy and myth using the framework of the characteristics of myth outlined in Chapter 1. From this perspective, the Canadian Constitution is depicted as a social charter that determines the rules for our social structure, and democracy is viewed as having an explanatory function that assists society in

understanding those rules, and behaving accordingly. The myth of democracy, however, is highlighted when democracy is applied to macro level government problems such as employment equity, unemployment, and national unity. The chapter concludes that belief in democracy has acquired a truth of its own that allows society to maintain order, and which has implications for our government.

Chapter 3 analyses the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility and the constitution of Political Neutrality as submyths of democracy. In keeping with the democratic principles identified in Chapter 2, the chapter presents the utility of the micro level of government doctrine and convention; their intent in developing a system that is accountable and accessible, and thus preserving freedom and equality among citizens. Upon closer examination, however, it is demonstrated that as submyths, they help institutionalize thinking in government and aid in justifying the current political system.

Chapter 4 discusses the organizational theory of empowerment, its definition and origins, and its attempted application to current public sector organizations. The chapter argues that empowerment is a new submyth of democracy that is incompatible with the other democratic submyths, and as a result, cannot truly exist in reality in public sector organizations. It is incompatible with the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility and convention of Political Neutrality in areas of responsibility and accountability. Nonetheless, like these submyths, empowerment as a submyth serves some purpose. As a submyth, it legitimates a subculture that appears to be in conflict with the dominant culture of democracy. Despite popular belief that it benefits morale and productivity in the workplace, empowerment as a submyth of democracy, is more obviously, a tool that aids managers in dealing with both external and internal issues facing public sector organizations today.

Myth is said to take humans on a journey into ourselves in hopes of developing a clearer understanding of our world. There is something in the human condition that wants to imagine there are worlds, or aspects of our own world, that are more heroic, more exciting, or more noble. "The myths of the state are romances, which identify enemies and heroes and promise larger than life happiness." (Frye, p.185) This journey into the myth of democracy has assisted me in developing a clearer understanding of our world.

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CHAPTER 1

THE CHARACTERISTICS AND USES OF A MYTH

CHAPTER 1
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND USES OF A MYTH

This chapter analyses the concept of myth, its origin and its characteristics for determining human and organizational behaviour. It begins with a brief discussion on the relationship between culture and myth, and the need to be aware of a myth's utility. The chapter explores the theories of myths in an effort to identify a practical definition and understanding of the use of myths as applied to organizational behaviour. The theories examined are derived from the disciplines within which most of the research and study on myth have occurred; namely, the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology.

The first group of theories is from scholars working in the field of cultural anthropology who believed and believe that myth is a means of communicating shared values and beliefs among members of a social and/or organizational group whose purpose is to legitimize particular practices and structured arrangements. (Sorel, 1941, Malinowski, 1945, and Selznick, 1957) The second group of theories is from sociologists who further explore the development of cultural arrangements through the practices and structures they create. This research suggests some interesting characteristics of history and religion that are equated to the properties and power of myth. One researcher looks at socially integrating myths as defined by the leadership in an organization. (Selznick, 1957) The final grouping reviews the cognitive psychology theories which describe what myths mean to the individual psyche; some have suggested that myths are processed unconsciously in an "archetype" form which, in turn, counterbalances our conscious thoughts so they may be retrieved in a coherent, sequential manner of events.

In reviewing the theories, a variety of questions will be addressed: do myths serve a purpose? what can they do? and finally, how can they be applied to organizational behaviour? Each grouping of theories will, therefore, aid in building a framework for identifying the important principles and potential uses of myth. The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis is that myths have several uses for understanding organizational behaviour.

A DEFINITION OF MYTH:

Common to all cultures is the presence of myths. In some instances, myths are viewed as the fundamental and indispensable element in human kind's social and cultural life. (Carrier, p.248) Within organizational cultures, myths "Are as much a part of an entity's system of integration as are its goals and corporate strategies." (Smith and Simmons, p.377) There are no exceptions. Even in government, organizations are "Held together by a myth-system... wherever he goes, whatever he encounters, man spins about him his web of myth as the caterpillar spins its cocoon." (MacIver, 1947, p.5)

As with the concept of culture, there is no commonly accepted definition of what a myth is and what purpose it serves. "Most attempts to synthesize world mythology rest on the assumption that there is an overarching pattern linking all myths. But the synthesizers disagree about what the pattern is." (Doniger, p.181)

Myth is usually referred to as a story, a parable or an allegory. Contrary to popular belief, however, it is identified by the feelings it generates. The common visceral reaction to the word "myth" denotes an untruth - a story lacking in factual information or historical validity. (James, 1993). Although this

is true in part, a myth also offers a traditional story that contains historical content and whose origin has been hazy.

A myth offers learnings from the past so they may be used in the future. As one author notes, there is an intimate connection between story and experience in "That we store our lives away within us largely by storying them." (Randall, p.320) It is the experiential lesson often presented in the absence of a teacher, parent, or an employer. As Barthes observed, myth is a system of communication, a message which allows "One to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form." (Barthes, p.109)

A myth, therefore, is not just a story that is passed from generation to generation, it also contains a metaphysical meaning or explanation of some phenomenon which guides future behaviour. "It has an explanatory function, but its principal task is not to explain physical phenomena, but human actions." (Carrier, p.248) Disbelievers need only remember the childhood stories that influenced their learnings such as Robin Hood, who taught the importance of giving to those in need, or Pinnochio who warned children of the negative consequences of telling a lie. These and other lessons are learned in the form of myth and practices by all age groups. More importantly, it appears that those lessons learned initially in whatever endeavour, are the ones that most affect our lives. "We are doing a lot of myth switches right now such as Dances With Wolves. But a lot of us still have in our gut perspectives from the past." (James, 1992) Therein lies the paradox of myth; to change our present we must understand and break away from our past.

Myths have always played an integral role in the development of organizational life whether that organization be a clan, a nation, a band or a government department. They are usually passed along daily in response to some organizational problem or episode. Although they are treated as common place, myths are a powerful force in developing and motivating behaviour. Unlike typical lessons or stories, myths attempt to explain the truths or what may appear to be the truths about human nature. Moreover, myths create beliefs, influence attitudes and guide behaviour all in an effort to determine a common perspective or understanding in order to serve a specific objective.

> We include all human approaches and attitudes, all the modes in which men face or formulate the business of living. Whatever valuational responses men give to the circumstances and trials of their lot, whatever conceptions guide their behavior, spur their ambitions, or render existence tolerable - all alike fall within our ample catagory of myth. (MacIver, p.5)

ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORIES

Various disciplines have studied the meaning and usefulness of myths. Anthropologists, for instance, have substantial evidence that many types of formal structures recur or vastly differ due to traditional oral and written literature in the form of myths. Scholars such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Claude Levi-Strauss focused on the functional theory of myth as a means of creating order from disorder. Their opinions differed, however, as to why humans need myths and what myths can achieve.

MALINOWSKI'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

Through his studies of the Trobriender tribe, Malinowski saw myths as practically linked with humans' basic biological utilities. Similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Malinowski believed that myths are as much a part of a community's needs as are food and water. The job of the myth, he said,

"Is a warrant, a charter, and even a practical guide to the activities with which it is connected." (Strenski, p.xvii) Myths are not actually meant to be explanations, but are active parts of culture like commands, or guarantees intended to maintain the legitimacy of social arrangement. As an example, Malinowski cites the biblical story of Adam and Eve, (which may or may not be true) to illustrate the function of a myth. In the past, this myth has been used as a social charter for the institutions of wearing clothing, bearing children and the development of a work ethic. His point is that myths serve a necessary practical function for the survival of a culture. (Strenski, p.xvii)

Aside from the practical needs, Malinowski claims that myth serves our needs at an unconscious level. Myths work on us subrationally, without our knowledge and as such, provide a pragmatic charter of primitive belief with moral wisdom.

> Our will to believe myths of life beyond the grave testify to the natural built-in drives and instincts of our animal nature. These visceral reactions translate into emotions which overwhelm our rational critical calculating mind, and thus make believers out of every one of us - all without our being necessarily being aware of it. (Strenski, p.xix)

Myths, therefore, are not so important in what they say, but more in what they mean to the individuals to whom they are directed. Telling myths about life everlasting is not simply a report about life in another dimension or space. Instead, they are stories intended to create an effect on their audience now. In the case of death, myths demonstrably make people feel better about their inevitable fates. "The bottom line about such a myth is what it does - it boosts our morale." (Strenski, p.xx) The audiences attending the movie "Ghost" were obviously moved by the story of the return of a dead loved one. The audience appeared to linger on the hopes that the dead character's life would somehow be restored. From this perspective, Malinowski explains that myths could be better

understood by looking at what they **do** versus what they **say**. This is the utility aspect of myth!

Are myths then merely lies we are telling ourselves? Perhaps. But they are noble lies, says Malinowski, ones that do some good for people in situations where they believe nothing more can be done. People can rely on the hopes given to them by these beliefs. In reference to the Trobriender tribe, Malinowski explains that "They would screen with the vivid texture of their myths, stories and beliefs about the spirit world, the vast emotional void gaping beyond them." (Strenski, p.xx) In his analysis of the myths of constitutional debates, Franks agrees with Malinowski when he says that persuasive agruements can be made in favour of some myths, and against others. "In a very fundamental sense myths are not 'true' or 'false'. But they can be 'better' and 'worse'. And their merits can and should be the subject of disputation and choice." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.6)

Without the practical job of emotional fulfilment through myths, societal functioning would fall into disarray. Society is better off in believing a myth like that portrayed in the movie "Ghost", even if it is a noble lie, than if people believed there were no possibilities of being reunited with their loved ones. "Such myths keep alive human hope, and with it human society." (Strenski, p.xxi)

For Malinowski, this idea of the impact of myth naturally led him to inquire about the "myth-maker" and the differences in the audiences to which myths are presented. Accordingly, he suggested that myths must be studied within the faith and social contexts in which they occurred. To start, the myth-maker puts a myth in the ears of others who will continue to circulate it. Malinowski equates this myth-making process to the circulation of money in a market, and that it will be received in different

ways and will have a differing impact on people. When the circulation begins anew, the myth again is "spent" on different audiences who may or may not choose to hear or adopt it. However, beyond its original authorial and intended meaning, Malinowski felt a deeper understanding of myth existed.

Not only will the spoken myth be transformed in its very recitation, but it will vary with the predetermined social and cultural nature of its audiences. Malinowski asks the reader to consider the story or myth of Christopher Columbus. This myth in which most of the Western world has been schooled, is a form of charter that views our nation as being built upon the values of the heroic explorers who settled it. "Yet in these days of ethnic diversity, we expect that Christopher Columbus will mean another thing when the interests of special audiences are brought to bear even when the same words are used." (Strenski, p.xxii)

Closer to home, for example, we have the story of Louis Riel who sought to gain rights for the Canadian Metis population. The official, prevalent myth about Riel was that he was a traitor and a criminal interested in furthering his personal gains. As Aboriginal peoples gain the respect and attention they have long sought in their attempts to create self government, however, the myth of Louis Riel is rapidly becoming the story of a hero for all Manitobans and perhaps Canadians in general.

LEVI-STRAUSS'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

Levi-Strauss agreed with Malinowski on several issues regarding myth, but they parted ways in distinguishing why cultures held myths. Rather than believing that myths met the biological and unconscious needs of people, Levi-Strauss saw myths as people's desire to understand the world

around them, its nature and their society. "To achieve that end, they proceed by intellectual means exactly as a philosopher, or even to some extent a scientist, can and would do." (Levi-Strauss, 1978, p.16)

Levi-Strauss said that mythological stories are, or seem to be, arbitrary and meaningless, or even absurd, yet they reappear all over the world. He found similar creations in parts of the world where there had been no prior contact and attributed their existence to a form of common order. "If this represents a basic need to order in the human mind... the need probably exists because there is some order in the universe and the universe is not a chaos." (Levi-Strauss, 1978, p.13) He cautions that myth is not scientific thinking as we know it, which is to divide a phenomenon into as many parts as necessary in order to understand it. Mythical thinking aims to reach by the shortest means possible, a wholistic understanding of nature, and our immediate/particular environment.

This explanation of myth, in part, resembles Malinowski's notion of myth being a noble lie. Myth offers humankind the opportunity to understand nature through their ideas and beliefs, and on that basis, they structure their lives. Levi-Strauss claims, therefore, that myth is unsuccessful in giving people more material power over the environment, but does provide people with hopes and dreams. "...it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe. It is, of course, only an illusion." (Levi-Strauss, 1978, p.17) Myths are grounded in the epistomology of ideas that are reflected in some form of reality.

Levi-Strauss goes on to say that scientific thinking limits the amount of mental power people exercise. The mental power we need to use or that interests us changes from generation to generation, and it

is never the exact mental capacity it used to be. To illustrate this point, Levi-Strauss explains how a particular tribe is able to see the planet Venus in full daylight, something which was thought to be difficult, if not impossible. According to astronomers, when a certain amount of light is emitted by this planet in full daylight, it is not entirely inconceivable that it could be seen with the naked eye. Old treatises on navigation also recorded that sailors were perfectly able to see Venus in broad daylight. Probably we could still do so with a trained eye.

Many of the skills and knowledge we once had regarding our environment and its resources have been lost. But they have not been lost for nothing, says Levi-Strauss, they have simply been replaced. Today we use skills required for operating a vehicle, programming a computer or cooking with a microwave oven. Contemporary anthropologist, Jennifer James, supports this concept of different mental capacities when she states, "We are inundated with hundreds of times more information in our lives today than any homosapiens before us. Our brains are fine. We just need to use them differently." (James, 1993)

As the human mental capacities[1] and the skills that accompanied those capacities changed, so did the way in which myths were created and used. Nonetheless, Levi-Strauss contends that myths continue to play a similar role from one culture to the next.

One similar structure of myth that Levi-Strauss discovered, was that they typically contained polarized thinking. They are characterized by "Binary contrasts, that is, by two elements or themes that can be viewed as standing in diametric opposition to each other." (Harris, p.458) As Malinowski

[1]The question of whether human mental capacities have physiologically changed over time continues to be debated.

believed, so too did Levi-Strauss, that uniformity in cultures was the result of unconscious thought processes. Levi-Strauss, however, saw the unconscious process fulfilling a different human need.

> The most important structural feature of the human mind is the tendency to dichotomize, or to think in terms of binary oppositions, and then to attempt to mediate this opposition by a third concept, which may serve as the basis for yet another opposition. (Harris, p.552)

This is not to say that the interpretation of myths is a strictly dialectic process. There are anomolies and contradictions within events, and actions of the players, that make them suitable to various interpretations and meanings. "In a well-developed society there is also usually enough variety in and competition between the many myths and symbols that no single interpretation of events and meaning remains uncontested." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.6)

At the same time, myths are also not simply a matter of relativity where one interpretation is as acceptable as another. As Franks reveals; "Some myths correspond more closely to reality than others, or give meaning to a wider range of events, texts, and other phenomena, or create a stronger resonance with the internal world of feelings, values and perceptions." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.6)

But as Strauss reminds us, myths typically represent dichotomies of those feelings, perceptions, and values. Examples of the types of dichotomies found in myths include the contrasts of good versus evil, younger versus older, beautiful versus ugly, passive versus aggressive, and so on. Polarized thinking generates a sense of enjoyment within an individual derived from the simultaneous stimulation of surprise and familiarity. Levi-Strauss stated it was also a general logic of a different order. A society that defines its segments in terms of high and low, sky and land, day and night, can

also incorporate within itself social and moral attitudes toward, for example, war and peace, conciliatory and adversarial, political and administrative, good and bad. The binary contrast in a myth...

> ... does not confine itself to abstract contemplation of a system of correspondence, but rather furnishes the individual members of these segments with a pretext and sometimes even a provocation to distinguish themselves by their behaviour. (Levi-Strauss, 1962, p.170)

As myths distinguish themselves in cultures, they create unique identities that enable cultures to become different from each other. It is through these different identities that change may occur.

Levi-Strauss was also concerned with differentiating between myths and history. Mythology, he concluded, is static; the same elements being constantly repeated in what appear to be a closed system. In contradistinction, history appears to be an open system, in which myths can be arranged and rearranged. As a result, Levi-Strauss believes that history has, to a large extent, replaced mythology and that it fulfills the same function of keeping the future faithful to the present and to the past. "But nevertheless, the gap which exists in our mind to some extent between mythology and history can probably be breached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from, but as a continuation of mythology." (Levi-Strauss, 1978, p.43) From this perspective, history and myth can be linked throught a lived, memorable experience such as a lesson learned. The understanding of history evolves in the absence of such an experience.

Together, these anthropologists presented their theories that the function of myths is to meet not only people's biological and social needs, but that they also fulfill people's unconscious feelings. Myths allow people to share their values and beliefs and make them feel good by offering some form of

hope. Their content is not as important as their impact on an audience. To this end, myths maintain tradition and promote growth by creating order out of disorder.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Sociology, on the other hand, focuses on the way myths socially arrange groups and organizations. Theories on myth from this perspective provide some interesting insights into the historical, political and philosophical realms which can be associated with the ways in which beliefs and commitments are developed and fostered.

SOREL'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

George Sorel was one such scholar who was interested in discovering the feelings by which masses of people are moved to form themselves into groups. He notes that an enormous number of our political ideas originated from war. In his book, Reflections On Violence, Sorel looks at the role of myths during the historical episodes of the Christian Reformation, the Socialist Revolution and the syndicalist "general strikes" during the early 19th century.

He found that men participating in great social movements tend to picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause was certain to triumph. Sorel proposed to call these mental constructs or pictures people had formed for themselves "myths", which he defined as "...a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken (by Socialism) against modern society." (Sorel, p.137) Like the anthropologists, he believed the illusory images were not as relevant as the affect or action that resulted.

Sorel outlined how the myth of a general strike engendered in the proletariat the most noble, deepest and moving sentiments that they could possess in their war against the bourgeoisie. The strike grouped them all in a "coordinated picture", and bringing them together gave each of them a level of intensity that appealed to both their painful memories of conflict and their glorious thoughts of victory. It is the myth of strike, not the language used, that transmits with perfect clarity the shared values and beliefs of such a group. Moreover, it does not simply conjure emotions, but fuels them. As Sorel explains, myths "Are not descriptions of things, but expressions of determinations to act." (Sorel, p.32) From this perspective, myths can be prescriptions of eschatological mediation for a fixed mortality, which in this case, creates feelings that reflect a revolutionary immortality.

Once the general strike myth is adopted, its devotees are beyond discouragement. After every abortive experiment, the proletariat "...recommence their work: the solution is not yet found, but it will be. The idea that no solution exists never occurs to them, and in this lies their strength." (Sorel, p.36) The solution, in essence, is no longer of importance. It simply becomes the means, while the myth, or the anticipation of conquering power, in the case of the strike, appears to be the end. What struck Sorel in this transformation was the question: how is it possible myth can survive so many failures and allow individuals to lose sight of their goals?

For a long time, myths were founded on the legends of the Reformation and revolutions which preserved all their value as long as they remained unshaken, and consequently, they appeared immune to criticism. Sorel believed that myths gave this appearance because they are irrefutable.

> A myth cannot be refuted, since it is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expersion of these convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in consequence, unanalysable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical descriptions. (Sorel, p.33)

Sorel argues this theory by comparing myths with refutable utopias. Unlike myths, utopias are intellectual products created by theorists who, after observing and discussing the known facts, establish models which they can use in society. They contain combinations of imagery and calculated reasoning that may be fitted more appropriately into legislation. To this end, utopias are used to direct thinking toward reform in order to repair an existing system.

In contrast, myths may lead to revolutions. They are doctrine expressed in words that are created by few, but shared by many. They profess high moral value and undaunting commitment, and are usually more spontaneous in their development than they are planned. "People who are living in this world of 'myths' are secure from all refutation; this has led many to assert that (Socialism) is a kind of religion." (Sorel, p.35)

Is myth a form of religion? People are often struck by the fact that religious convictions are unaffected by criticism, and have, therefore, concluded that what cannot be explained by science must be religious. Myth "is a symbolic statement about the social structure in that the god of a society is the society itself divinized." (Wilkins, 1978, p.52) Although many have disputed this theory that society worships itself through its myths, it does shed light on the idea that people in large systems generally find it difficult to relate to an entire society. For sociologist Emile Durkheim, myth is part of a religious system. People need concrete symbols because "the clan is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity." (Durkheim, p.220) Linking a myth to a particular group, therefore, provides that group with a unique identity and nurtures differences among various groups as discussed earlier by Levi-Strauss.

Sorel disagreed with Durkheim. He acknowledged that the properties of religion and myth are similar; a type of moral reform penetrating the roots of one's being. Both aim to prepare, guide and usually reconstruct the individual (not an east feat)! Despite these similarities, Sorel affirmed that religion and myth continue to be treated as two separate philosophies. Sorel reconciles the issue by stating "That it is not only religion which occupies the profounder region of our mental life; revolutionary myths have their place there equally with religion." (Sorel, p.35)

The whole purpose of myth for Sorel rests on the belief that without myth there is no need to change. Myths lead people to prepare themselves for a struggle which would destroy the status quo.

> As long as there are no myths accepted by the masses, one may go on talking of revolts indefinitely, without ever provoking any revolutionary movement; this is what gives such importance to the general strike and renders it so odious to socialists who are afraid of a revolution. (Sorel, p.32)

Once again, there surfaces a paradox of myth. For as much as it is intended to sustain tradition, it is also used to bring about change. Though to Sorel, myth does not pose a paradox of opposing intents, instead: he felt it must be judged as a means of acting on the present, whatever that present may be. Attempts to discuss how far myths can be taken in the future is devoid from sense. To Sorel, a myth remains as long as it is acted upon. When the belief in a myth's glory perishes, it is weakened as were the heroic myths which had such great popularity at the beginning of the 19th century. (Sorel, p.32)

SELZNICK'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

A more current sociological perspective on myth comes from Selznick, who focuses his theory on "socially integrating myths". Selznick describes organizations as rationally created institutions that

are "infused with value". (Selznick, p.17) Like Sorel, Selznick believed the sharing of values through myths creates a social arrangement known as institutions. In his research, Selznick looks to the leadership of organizations as a means to develop a clear statement of goals based on what would appeal to its members and, hence, unite them.

These goals or "socially integrated myths" harness the human energy present in the informal culture of the organization. (Selznick, p.18) To this end, the leader must commit the organizational members to certain beliefs and values in an effort to instill a sense of clarity and stability for institutionalization to occur. Commitment to a given myth or goal is analogous to an "organizational mission or constitution" which provides its members and outsiders with a clear image of the organization. (Wilkins, p.38) This makes organizations predictable in their actions, and as a result, they often assume a distinct identity.

Socially integrated myths offer hope because they "...are efforts to state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise..." (Selznick, p.151) Even more important than communicating the myth, Selznick says, is the ability to recognize the need for the myth.

> ...creativity depends on having the will and the insight to see the necessity of the myth, to discover a successful formulation, and above all to create the organizational conditions that will sustain the ideals expressed. (Selznick, p.151)

According to Selznick, the benefits of socially integrating myths include clear rationale for decision-making, increased security through stability, and a source of emotional energy derived from an identification with shared values. The problem with integrating myths, on the other hand, is that they

can halt an organization's growth. Institutionalization can be dysfunctional because the organization lacks the flexibility required to adapt to the new and changing environment in which it exists. Organizational members become more committed to the myths than the survival of the organization. Consequently, Selznick felt that institutionalization most suits those organizations which do not have routine tasks, and whose problems and solutions are undefined.

Sorel and Selznick both suggest that myths unite people through the sharing of images and values despite their differing views on how this occurs. Sorel focuses on the metaphysical aspect of myths and argues that their strength lies in their irrefutability. Selznick, on the other hand, concentrates on myths in terms of organizational behaviour claiming they institutionalize thinking. Both urge that myth can change a social system; one through revolution, the other through leadership. Selznick more than Sorel, however, acknowledges the benefits and downfalls of the use of myths.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF MYTH

Jung and Kerenyi explore the concept of myth in the area of psychology. Building on the research of anthropologists, they define myth as "...a body of material contained in tales about god and god-like beings, heroic battles and journeys to the Underworld... tales already well known but not unamendable to further reshaping." (Jung and Kerenyi, p.3)

JUNG AND KERENYI'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

To Kerenyi, the shaping of a myth was pictorial and its meaning explanatory. He described mythology as a "kind of immersion in ourselves" that leads to our centre of wholeness. "Going back

into ourselves in this way and rendering an account of it we experience and proclaim the very foundations of our being; that is to say, we are 'grounding' ourselves." (Jung and Kerenyi, p.12)

Our mentality does not invent myths, it experiences them, so to find ourselves we must look inside ourselves. It was from this description that Jung decided mythical elements must be present in the unconscious psyche. The products are not a definite mythical form, but rather, they are mythological components which he called primordial images or "archetypes". According to Jung's archetypal definition, myths originate in the unconscious in order to counterbalance the conscious level of the human psyche. They provide "... a system of functioning in the present whose purpose is to compensate for or correct, in a sensible manner, the inevitable one-sidednesses and extravagances of the conscious mind." (Jung and Kerenyi, p.112)

It is the role of the conscious mind to concentrate on relatively few thoughts at one time and to raise them to the highest level of clarity. Other conscious thoughts are naturally excluded resulting in a certain "one-sidedness" in regards to the conscious thoughts being brought forth. This natural one-sidedness is further narrowed by human will and environmental conditions "...causing the person to deviate further and further from the laws and roots of his being." (Jung and Kerenyi, p.113)

The paradox of myth in this psychological theory, similar to the other theories, refers to a struggle; on the one hand, myth provides the possibility of human freedom while simultaneously it acts as a source of "endless transgressions" against one's instincts.

Jung speaks of this mythical paradox in reference to change.

> Accordingly, primitive man, being closer to his instincts, like the animal, is characterized by his fear of novelty and adherence to tradition. To our way of thinking, he is painfully backward, whereas we exalt progress. (Jung and Kerenyi, p.113)

Although many would argue that our current thinking toward change is more "primitive" than progressive, it remains that even "progress" has its consequences. Consider, for example, society's mythical dream of flying which brought with it the dropping of atomic bombs, or society's desire to find alternate energy sources which has resulted in nuclear accidents.

Jung was consistent with other theorists in that he believed myths in the unconscious have vital meaning and purpose. Behind any philosophy, revolution or enlightenment, there is always a myth that eventually comes forward as the ultimate truth. Myths do not merely **represent**, they **are** the mental life of humankind, "Which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has lost his soul." (Jung, p.102)

JUNG AND CAMPBELL'S THEORIES OF MYTH:

One cannot discuss Jung's theories of myth without introducing the widely recognized theories of Joseph Campbell. Campbell, who used the works of Jung in his research, studied myth from a holistic perspective with particular reference to the realm of religion. He saw the importance of myth as a cultural resource in his mytho-psychology of religion:

> Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth. (Doty, p.10)

In Jung and Campbell's work on myth, one finds the recurring theme of a journey or "stages of life", where the stage is not only a place, but a vehicle of time that carries the individual through life. Each stage has its own task that is defined by the intersection of biological needs and societal custom. Like Jung, Campbell believes that myth takes humans beyond what underlies the normal, perceptual world. By dwelling on the mythical world, "We gain the power to adjust to the demands of life in general and to pass safely through the thresholds of life established by our society in particular." (Gulick, p.33)

According to Campbell, myth has four functions; mythical, cosmological, sociological and psychological. The source of myth's power is the product of human intentions, and its functions provides a framework for these intentions. As Campbell notes, "When stories are read as sources of advice about how to live well under any circumstances, the psychological function of myth predominates." (Gulick, p.36) Campbell, therefore, is consistent with the scholars discussed above when he insists that myth is more a social than individual phenomena.

A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND THE USES OF MYTH

All of these theories contribute to an understanding of what myth is and the purposes it serves. Within organizational behaviour, the theories provide a foundation of understanding for the origin and use of myths in organizational life.

As mentioned earlier, this study defines myth generally as a lesson and/or written message translated through language into a story, teaching or the like. Although myths are often viewed as fabrications,

they are more "Reconstructions in words and images of otherwise raw, uninterpreted events (assuming such exist), never quite 'true' in a technical way." (Randall, p.322) In other words, there is no one particular way to describe a myth.

CREATION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES:

Myths are an integral element in organizational culture, and as a result, contribute to the daily activities in organization life. According to the theories discussed in this chapter, myths have a number of uses. First, myths provide a charter or blueprint for the ways in which an organization's work should be structured. For example, stories about the boss "taking no guff from anyone" or "ruling with a firm hand" leave no question of who is in charge of the daily operations. The doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility and the convention of Political Neutrality are both akin to social charters in the way they define the conduct of politicians and public servants. Such myths informally reinforce and maintain the legitimacy of the structure for communication, control and authority within the organizational hierarchy.

EXPLANATORY FUNCTIONS:

Secondly, myths provide a type of explanation which may be true or not true, but which assists in people's understanding of what is happening. Several, if not most, activities in an organization are not shared or clearly understood by its participants. Consequently, individuals need a means by which to comprehend what may be happening to, or around them. Myths around comments such as "plans are never thought through around here" or "we are not supposed to know why" justifies the reasons participants are uninformed. As mentioned earlier, the truth is irrelevant. It is as though people need to know something, anything, versus knowing nothing. Myths provide that form of explanation.

When participants share these mythical explanations, they not only satisfy their curiosity and express their frustration, but they also confirm that others share those feelings. Comments such as "Is it just me, or are others being treated like this?", are attempts to verify that others agree. Feeling of loss, isolation and fear are reduced when it is confirmed that others are experiencing the same feelings. Furthermore, the myth can often make individuals or groups feel good or positive. As a result, myths through an explanatory function, also fulfill the emotional needs of those involved.

UNITY THROUGH SHARED BELIEFS:

Sharing beliefs and values via myths, as identified by all of the theorists, brings about unity in a group. Unity and commitment give people hope, and in some instances, provide them the initiative to take action. As Selznick indicates, there is a source of energy derived from an emotional identification within a group or organization. Sorel refers to this energy when he discusses the ability of myths to move masses of people to act, or in some cases, revolt. Such behaviour is not uncommon in organizations where participants band together in an effort to bring about changes in structure, process or leadership. The most obvious instance, as identified by Sorel, is a revolution like the general strike where employees acted against their employer.

THE NEED TO CHANGE:

This raises the fourth use of myth; its ability to bring about change. In conjunction with its other functions, myth instills ideas and promises in the human psyche (as false as they may sometimes be) that there are alternatives to the current state of affairs. Without such ideas, there would be no need to change the status quo.

Stories that are based on a common theme, that provide a positive outlook and that join people together, can also bring about change. As Levi-Strauss points out, every culture develops its unique characteristics, and thus identity, through the development of myth. When this uniqueness of culture is shared among cultures, and ideas are passed on, change comes about.

This belief that myth brings about change may be a myth in and of itself. Still, it should not leave the reader to believe that myth is easily manipulated to bring about just any change. As Malinowski reminds us, myths must be considered within the context they are presented and heard as there are no guarantees they will be accepted or adopted. Furthermore, myths are not readily identifiable because much of mythical thinking takes place in the unconscious, and may be muddled or altered by the time it is manifested at the conscious or behavioural level. Consider, for example, Jung's theory that myths counterbalance the conscious thoughts with unconscious mythical thinking. Or Levi-Strauss's theory of binary contrasts where myth is developed in the unconscious as a means of settling polarized thinking. Changing current myths is not a simple feat.

MAINTAIN TRADITION:

Possibly the most outstanding feature of myth is its staying power. It is repeated and followed over generations. It gives credence to what we say and do. For these and other reasons, myths are difficult to refute. The commitment and conviction with which they are often conveyed makes believers out of most of us. According to Sorel, Durkheim and Campbell, myth is a kind of religion that takes on a trust of its own.

If an organization, for example, has promoted through myths that taking risks is dangerous, no organizational mission or goal is going to dispel that myth. Even a change in the leadership will likely fall subject to that myth and in the course of changing it, the new leadership may be labelled as trying to trap people or, rather, as not willing to "practice what they preach."

According to one study, such organizational stories proliferate because they offer self-enhancing attributions for organizational change, and such attributions make the institution unique, enabling its participants to identify with the place they work or distance themselves from an undesirable institution. (Martin, et.al, 1983) Myth, therefore, offers a unique character to those who adopt it, and thus, offers a form of identity.

Herein lies the problem with myth; once accepted, it is difficult to alter or transform. Aside from its irrefutability, a myth is difficult to change because many people do not know or are unwilling to understand that they are being influenced by it. Individuals and groups should be aware of what is driving their feelings and their resultant actions. Pearson agrees by her comments on the need for "...making explicit the myths that govern our lives", otherwise, "...we are hostages to them and can do nothing else but live out their plots to the end." (Pearson, p.xx)

On the other hand, myths do grow and change. All of the theories discussed are not unamendable to some form of transformation of myth. As myths are passed on to others, and are carried through in the form of traditions, they are modified to adapt to the contemporary environment in which they exist. As MacIver indicates...

> ... it is important to observe that the myth sustaining a relationship is often different from the myth that bore it. Once the track is pioneered, many men follow it. The original myth may be forgotten and if it endures, it changes. The relationship becomes a custom, the custom an institution. (MacIver, p.6)

SUSTAINS ORDER:

The final and overriding usefulness of myth is that it sustains order. Myths serve many purposes, all of which appear to guide human thinking and behaviour in some fashion so that there can be a continuance of order within the disorderly complexities of society. Most of the theories about myths indicate that myth creates order out of disorder. They make sense of those matters where nonsense prevails, they give meaning where no other meaning can be readily found, they give hope when only despair is evident. Myth guides our daily thoughts and beliefs, and consequently, determines our daily behaviors.

Myth, can also create disorder out of order. This disorder, although temporary in nature, occurs when a new myth begins to overtake the common myth. Frustrated and/or disillusioned with a common myth, society will question that myth, and as a result, may seek another. Like the general strike that Sorel discusses, where the proletariate revolted against the dominance of the bourgeois, and thus, created a new social order. "Every society is held together by a myth-system, a complex of dominating thought-forms that determines and sustains all activities." (MacIver, p.4)

This chapter discusses just a few of the more popular theories in an effort to draw an understanding of what a myth is, what uses it has, and how it might serve to identify human action. The next chapter identifies and analyses democracy as a popular myth in public sector organizations, and determines its usefulness based on the framework developed here.

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CHAPTER 2

DEMOCRACY AS A MYTH:

A MACRO LEVEL ANALYSIS OF UTILITY IN GOVERNMENT

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This chapter will discuss democracy as a myth and the incongruency between society's stated dedication to this myth versus its actions. In keeping with the framework of the usefulness of myths as outlined in chapter 1, it will identify democracy on a macro-level as a social order where the Constitution is viewed as a charter that determines the rules on which we base our democratic political faith, and ultimately, our social structure. The democratic myth will also be viewed as having an explanatory function that assists people in understanding societal rules and behaviours. This use of the myth, in part, fulfills society's rational and emotional needs and creates a sense of unity and commitment. In addition, the belief in democracy allows society to maintain order and as a result, democracy has grown into a kind of religion that takes on a truth of its own. From this perspective, the chapter will conclude with a brief discussion on democracy as a myth and its implications for the future of our government.

Democracy perhaps, is the strongest myth in our society today. In government and in society in general, many profess a dedication to the values of individual rights, freedoms and equality which are the core beliefs behind the principles of democracy. For over a century, democracy has literally meant "a form of government **by** the people, **for** the people." Today, democracy is seen as providing a framework founded on a majority rule which gives rise to a set of governing principles within a state. These principles are manifested through a variety of systems that allow individuals and groups to actively participate in the planning of their collective affairs in order to achieve the true democratic values of freedom and equitable treatment for all.

Despite this dedication to democracy, many people would argue that democracy does not truly exist. In a truly democratic society, individuals should not fear being deprived of their basic necessities and economic freedom. They should enjoy the protection of being treated as equally as possible. But in our society today, many people experience fear of some form of deprivation, and they do not enjoy the protection of equitable treatment. In Canada, a small minority of the population have the vast majority of the wealth. An average of 9.6% Canadians remain unemployed. (Stats Canada, p.A5) Human rights complaints in regards to equity issues continue to be filed. (Manitoba Human Rights Commission, 1993 Annual Report) Surely this is not democracy? "In a real democracy, the material conditions of people's lives should be humane and roughly equal." (Parenti, p.49) But as the richer become still richer and the poorer become still poorer, and as citizens increasingly feel their rights being taken away, we continue to profess a dedication to democracy. Why?

A HISTORY BUILT ON MYTHS

Democracy (Greek demos, "the people"; kratein, "to rule") has long since been associated with the ability to freely discuss politics, with the right to hold different ideas and pursue those differences by casting a vote to support a person who holds the same or similar beliefs. Historically, it represented the growing authority of some assembly of the people or of the people's representatives, such as the Greek "ecclesia", the Roman "comitia", and the English parliament. The right to different beliefs was an inherent condition of democracy whereby people could freely express themselves, seek converts, form organizations, and compete for success before the tribunal of public opinion. (MacIver, p.199)

The first known experiment in democratic government came from Athens where all citizens[1] could speak and vote in assemblies; this was known as direct democracy and it was used to control the affairs of its citizens. Though it lasted through part of the fifth century B.C., "The myth of democracy did not bite deep into the minds of this people." (MacIver, p.176) Its following appeared uncommitted to society's general welfare as the political philosophers at the time were more interested in the aristocratic legends. The one thinker who seemed to find democracy of interest was Socrates, who they eventually put to death.

It was not until the Middle Ages when more ground was broken for an inclusive or representative democracy. Unsurprisingly, the myth of democracy was borne from other myths that included Christian ethics and the universality of law. Christian ethics promoted the principle that "all men are equal in the sight of God" thus giving wider recognition to the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. At the same time, the universality of law was being taken very seriously on three levels: the law of a particular community that meant conforming to specific usages and traditions, the law that transcended community and ordered relations between men everywhere, and the law of nature itself and toward which all positive law should strive. (MacIver, p.181) These ideals became the ethical standards on which democracy was eventually based. As Kernaghan and Langford state, within the public service "... admonition to provide the public with fair and impartial service is rooted in the rule of law and the theory of natural justice...." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.22)

Much of Western democracy was based on the growth of the English model. When feudalism ended, a rich commercial middle class arose, possessing the money and leisure necessary to participate in

[1]Citizens in this context denotes only those individuals recognized as such by the state, and not those individuals deemed to be slaves and who were considered as having no rights.

governmental affairs. As it imposed the right to levy taxes and duty to be accountable for its spending policies, and as it eventually overcame the power of kings and the prerogatives of class, it theoretically denied political distinction between rich and poor, and to a small extent, men and women. Following this process, new forces came into play such as cultural, economic and technological changes that further influenced the traditional social order. The American Declaration of Independence, and the French and Industrial Revolutions were just a few of the resultant events that gave rise to the words "equality and justice for all" throughout the Western World.

To be equal also meant that one had to be free. To be free meant being able to manage one's own affairs and to be unimpeded in free competition with others. Not only did it refer to individual freedom, but a collective freedom. It was nature, not government, that provided the rules to be followed. "All men should be free, but being free meant being free from the oppressive hand of government." (MacIver, p.187) Thus, it was government's business to keep nature in the balance and unleash the kinds of action that would minimize pain among the citizens. Democracy, as it evolved, faced a whole host of issues and dangers.

A CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

By the early nineteenth century, democracy was intended to be a set of values embracing a governance of equality and liberty, and referred in the strictest sense to political gatherings of people in town hall meetings. (American Enterprise Institute, p.7/8) When it grew impractical to conduct government affairs in this manner, it was replaced by representation of elected officials who participated in government on behalf of the people. "The officials in a democracy more generally and

directly reflect the known or ascertained views of their constituents, sometimes subordinating their own judgment." (Funk & Wagnall, p.1) Today, these elected officials are charged with creating policies and making decisions through a variety of public consultations and other political processes including elections.

Despite this general understanding of democracy, it tends to mean many different things to different people. For many, it is simply a government **by** the people **for** the people. Specifically, democracy has been referred to as "a system of governance or ideas that represents both in **form** and **content** the needs and desires of the people." (Parenti, p.49) Others have argued that it is "the idea that free and equal persons should together control the conditions of their own association." (Cohen and Rogers, p.18) The themes in these definitions are twofold: government is legitimized by the consent of the governed, and a government should not be used to enrich the lives of only those who govern and/or those working with the government. (Barnet, p.20)

Decision making in a democracy must to be based on benefiting the general populace versus the privileged few. The system of governance is controlled by people who elect their representatives, and who through periodic scrutiny and elections, may return or remove the representative from office. Rules are designed to make these decisions, and uphold the principles of democracy. But some theorists argue that democracy, in the true sense, is not practised in society nor can it be clearly defined. Parenti, for example, views democracy as a system of rules for playing the game, and for which the constitution is the rule book. Mass participation and government accountability are encouraged but are not necessary conditions for winning the game.

"In the absence of certain substantive conditions, legalistic and procedural rights are of little value to millions who have neither the time, money nor opportunity to make a reality of their formal rights." (Parenti, p.50)

Democracy is not to be expressed in true terms. According to Paul Appleby, democracy is true only as a majority will and because there are so many majorities it is not something fixed. "It is often expressed only as consent and at times as a veto. In many instances it is a thing not developed at all, withheld, even nonexistent." (Appleby, p.333) Despite his views of an "ideal political freedom", Appleby acknowledges that democracy does exist as a means to conduct the affairs of a state whose people are empowered to bring about and remove their government via freedom of opinion and equality among its citizens.

Similarly, MacIver sees democracy as a form of government that is never completely achieved and is, consequently, difficult to identify and assess. He recognizes that in a democracy people can have control but he asks "Who are the people and how do they control?" This is a valid question, given that no definition offers a clear indication of who controls democracy and how this is accomplished. We do not know if it is all the citizens or just some of them. If it is a select few, who are they - the elected officials, the lobby groups or the executive officers of large corporations? Or it is that we know the answer and because it is contrary to the popular belief of democracy, we choose not to say so?

The difficulty in answering these and other questions lies in the fact that democracy is an evolutionary process that has always, and continues to be a myth. It remains a form of belief that is unclear in its

definition, is open to interpretation, is questionable as to its actual existence, and is therefore difficult to refute. So why do we believe in something that does not necessarily truly exist? As outlined in the previous chapter, a myth, whether true or false, serves a variety of vital purposes that are integral to any society's survival. As Appleby said, democracy as an ideal "... is only to be realized in the continuing operation of government dedicated to it and at the same time performing its regular and complicated business of governance." (Appleby, p.334)

DEMOCRACY AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE

To begin, democracy is a social ordering of life. For generations, increasing accommodations had to be made for organizing the state as more and more diverse people began living together. Guidelines for collective action had to be devised. This created the occasion for and the office of government. "Making civilization possible - maintaining social order in the face of more and more differentiated preoccupations - is the supreme responsibility of government." (Appleby, p.336) Through government, democratic rules are applied with the intent to promote a common good. As such, democracy has grown into a prescription for the way in which we conduct our daily work, personal activities and, in essence, our lives. Democracy is "a form of social organization and political practice which can define a unified movement out of the present morass." (Cohen and Rogers, p.18)

As a social structure, it legitimizes our patterns of communication and control. For example, through the democratic process one can determine who has authority and how decisions are made. "The efficacy of democracy <can be seen> in making social institutions, as well as the officials who

administer them and the leaders who preside over them, serviceable and responsive to the emergent needs of society..." (MacIver, p.437)

The Canadian Constitutional Charter is a compilation of rules and laws by which we preserve and supposedly practice, the principles of democracy. As such, the Constitution reigns supreme - supposedly, no government can create laws that supersede the Charter. "Constitutional convention plus constitutional law equal the total constitution of the country." These were the words of the Supreme Court of Canada in 1981 describing Canada's Constitution - its basic law of the land. (Bowker, p.11) Under the Charter, all Canadians are guaranteed the following Democratic rights:

- the right to vote in the election of the members of the Canadian House of Commons and of a provincial legislative assembly
- the right to stand for office in either of these institutions
- the requirement that no House of Commons and no legislative Assembly continue for longer than five years except in extraordinary circumstances
- the requirement that there be an annual sitting of Parliament and each Legislature (The Canadian Constitutional Highlights 1981)

Also set out in the Charter are the Fundamental Freedoms, Legal Rights and Equality Rights. Fundamental Freedoms involve freedom of religion, thought, belief, and expression; including freedom of the press and other media communication. The Legal Rights involve the right to life, liberty and security; the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, and the right to be presumed innocent. The Equality of Rights protects citizens from discrimination by governments on the basis of race, ethnic origin, religion, age, sex or disability. (The Canadian Constitutional Highlights 1981)

"The theory behind the Charter is that it is designed to protect citizens against oppressive action by the state, ie., government..."(Bowker, p.23) In practical terms, it means that if people want to work

they should be entitled to compete for a job. If people are unable to work they should be entitled to apply for benefits that provide them their basic necessities regardless of who they are. It means, among other things, that everyone is equal and must be treated as such.

Although this appears consistent with the intent of democracy, there is clear indication that this is not the case. First, in adopting the Charter, both Parliament and provincial Legislatures retained the power to pass laws that may conflict with the Charter in one or more of these areas. In other words, when government proposes a law that may limit the rights and freedoms set out in the Charter, "they must say clearly that this is what they are doing and accept full responsibility for the political consequences." (The Canadian Constitutional Highlights 1981) What is the use of outlining rights and freedoms that can, by law, be overridden?

A second point, related to the first, has to do with collective versus individual rights. Aside from the protections stated in the Charter regarding rights and freedoms, governments have been known to put in place laws that supersede those rights. Can one's rights be compromised by the rights of others? Absolutely, according to the Charter.

The most prominent of these instances is in the area of employment equity. Over the past decade, governments at all levels have implemented programs aimed at improving the situation of various groups, namely women, aboriginals, visible minorities and the disabled. In so doing, they have provided opportunities for these groups to receive special training and employment even when they were not necessarily the most appropriate candidates for a job. Although such activities were intended to correct past injustices, clearly they created new injustices that worked against individuals

who did not fall into the above noted categories. This has been termed "reverse discrimination". In light of this development, it should not be surprising to see backlash to such programs, for example, those in Ontario, where the government is currently discussing abolition of the Employment Equity Act and its initiatives. (Sullivan, p.1)

If the Constitution is being circumvented in terms of protecting the rights of its people, why bother having it? Because without it, society would be condoning past inequities and risk having an even lesser degree of protection for individual rights. That is why employment equity was created in the first place. Without laws protecting disadvantaged persons and/or visible minorities, society would continue to be dominated by the white, male population. Should that phenomenon have continued, the democratic myth says our society would run the risk of being less democratic in terms of a representative workforce than it currently is.

This is not to say that one must do wrong in order to do right. Everyone should have equal rights to compete for any job regardless of their race, colour, sex or disability. What governments did by introducing Employment Equity programs was blatantly compromise some individuals' democratic rights. Although that is wrong, it is not the point here. The point is, that it was the ideals within the myth of democracy, a recognition of an imbalance in representative government organizations, that drove governments in that direction in the first place. As Alok Mukherjee notes in his keynote address regarding Employment Equity,...

> ... it is not just a numbers-driven process, but a process for organizational change to make the workplace practices, structures and culture democratic, equitable and respectful of diversity" (Mukherjee, p.2).

This is slowly being recognized by governments who are looking at more inclusive programs/activities that promote and respect diversity. The democratic myth, through such social charters as the Canadian Constitution therefore, provides a means, albeit not always equitable, for creating more democratic institutions in society.

DEMOCRACY AS AN EXPLANATION

As noted in the previous example of employment equity, democracy as a myth also plays a role in explaining and justifying outcomes in society. "What the myth of Canadian democracy does, in essence, is help provide legitimacy to the Canadian political system." (Adie, p.5) Our ancestors bought into that premise when they developed this country. It was a land of freedom and a land of opportunity. As long as one followed the law, one could earn a comfortable living and in some instances, achieve great wealth. Today, immigrants coming to this country continue to believe their hopes and dreams will be fulfilled because of Canada's adherence to freedom and equitable treatment. Everyone appears to believe this whether it is overtly true or not.

One of the principle components of democracy as a myth is its ability to allow people to believe in it - despite any lack of truthfulness. A democratic society, according to Cohen and Rogers, "is an ongoing order" that is characterized by principles justifying its existence. One such principle is known as the principle of democratic legitimacy which requires individuals to be free and equal in determining the conditions of their own lives. Societal members have the right to be free in determining their own destiny. Collectively, they control the institutions, rules, and conditions by which they are governed. In essence, they hold the power. The only constraint within that system

is the one required by the conditions necessary to preserve public consultation. "Sovereignty is equally exercised in the sense that the views of each member of the democratic order are accorded equal weight in public deliberation." (Cohen and Rogers, p.150) In a capitalist democracy, such democratic rights are powerful social guarantees of individual freedom and equality.

In order for democracy to be legitimate, or to appear true for that matter, the authors argue that like any other legitimate principle, it must be manifest or clearly visible to members of the order in the actual workings of its institutions. Not only should it be seen as satisfying the requirement of equality and freedom through public deliberation, it should also be recognized as having been achieved. (Cohen and Rogers, p.150)

If democracy were truly achieved, then people would not be deprived of their basic necessities. Everyone would be seen and treated as equal. But they are not. Look anywhere in Canada and you will find there is a great deal of poverty, due primarily to high unemployment rates. According to official statistics, anywhere from 7.1% to 19.6% of the Canadian workforce is not working. (Stats Canada, p.A5) Over the last few years alone, welfare enrollment has tripled, leaving most people dependent on government support and living in poor to squalid conditions. Within our own province, many of our children live in poverty and most of these are of aboriginal descent. (Social Planning Council, p.6) "This is surely the first and most pressing reform for any democratic socialist government. The present levels of poverty and deprivation in affluent societies are unacceptably high." (George and Wilding, p.141) Yet we continue to believe that this is a democratic society!

In many instances, the democratic myth blinds us from seeing matters related to poverty. As a result, we seldom make the connection between the existence of democracy and the existence of poverty. "We are confronted by something that the myth insists should not be there, and therefore it becomes something that is not there in a conscious sense." (Adie, p.3)

From this perspective, poverty is an anomaly whose proportions are either not significant enough to be recognized or whose presence is not significantly dispersed to be felt. After all, most people do work and earn their own living. Who is poor anyway? Most people living in this country have food, clothing and shelter. So when do we determine someone is poor? Is it when the basic necessities for food, clothing and shelter consume the majority of one's earnings, or is it when one does not have enough money to send children to daycare?

More often, we operationalize the myth of democracy by explaining the existence of poverty in such a fashion that it is consistent with the belief but does not criticize it. We have bought into the belief of democracy that all are free and can determine their own destiny. Many people, therefore, explain that it is not society's fault that some people are poor - its their own fault. Government can only do so much for the individuals. If they choose not to do anything for themselves then they deserve the mistreatment they get. "Many Canadians have come to think that large numbers of people willingly choose a life on welfare." (Stothart, p.45) Consequently, a different focus is placed on the meaning of democracy; namely, democracy is not to blame for the existence of poverty, it is the poor individual who is at fault. "If we speak of democracy, we do not mean democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live." (George and Wilding, p.1)

These are just a few of the beliefs that prohibit society from connecting poverty to inequity and lack of freedom. To state otherwise, would be to deny that democracy exists, and who, with some level of authority, would be willing to admit that?

On the other hand, the myth of democracy has played an integral role in keeping in the minds of the political and administrative masters, that government should make policy decisions for the masses not a privileged few. As discussed earlier, the English model on which this country based its democratic government principles was born out of a belief that denied political distinction between rich and poor and eventually was able to overcome the power of the ruling classes. A democratic government has come to mean a public service whereby all citizens are entitled to equal access to information, and input into the governance of their affairs. Functionally, this means: keeping in mind, most if not all citizens' interests in decision-making; setting up offices in remote parts of the country so all may have access to programs; creating rules so all may be treated in a just and fair manner. Certainly, these practices do not make for a truly democratic society. But without any democratic myth to strive for, inequitable treatment and class distinction would surely be more prevalent than they are today.

> In a democracy, *everybody's* business quite properly takes precedence over *anybody's* business. This is confusing, because *anybody* knows *anybody's* business and *nobody* can really understand *everybody's* business. Democratic government gives consideration to anybody, but defers to everybody. (Appleby, p.337)

DEMOCRACY MAINTAINS ORDER

Democracy as a myth maintains order. It provides a context, through the constitutional charter and other such doctrines, in understanding and applying its beliefs and principles. As a result of this context and the strong beliefs which it promotes, democracy controls society. Adherence to the

principle of majority rule provides a clear direction for decision making. Public deliberation provides a means for how the decisions are made. These rules determine a form of agreement among the masses that then can be operationalized in some form of action.

Canada can be said to be a pluralistic society consisting of a vast array of regional, occupational and ethnic groups who are represented through three levels (aboriginal self-government would make it four levels) of government agencies. Pluralism, in this sense, is defined as being a multiplicity of private and public groups whose administrative and political factions are united according to the democratic principles of voicing their opinions and lobbying for their rights. (Parenti, p.302) In fact, each grouping is a microcosm of democracy and when they band together, they can create powerful forces. From a pluralistic perspective, these groups appear to be saying this is how democracy works among the masses:

1. Power is shared among representative sectors of the population.
2. The shaping of public policy involves input from a wide range of competing social groups.
3. No one group enjoys permanent dominance or suffers permanent defeat.
4. The distribution of benefits is roughly equitable or certainly not consistently exploitative. (Parenti, pp. 301 and 302)

Although it is true that democratic principles are intended to be unbiased in promoting economic needs and social interests, they are not consistently practised that way in government. Government does many different things for many different people. However, in doing so, government also consciously makes decisions that are not always in favour of the majority and consequently creates a significant inequity of power and influence among various groups. Whose rights are adopted?. Is it the individuals', or the groups' or both? Or is democracy simply a process for pitting individuals and groups against one other? It certainly can be. Yet, despite its sometimes bitter and unsatisfactory outcomes, it most always maintains order.

Producer interest groups and broader collective rights associations are examples of groups that actively lobby government to influence policies and laws in an effort to gain power. In the energy field, the Canadian Petroleum Association has been long dominated by the large multi-nationals who successfully influenced the 1960's and 1970's energy policies. In the food and agricultural policy field the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmer's Union have worked closely with provincial governments to preserve subsidies to grain transport. The professional producer groups of medicine and law continue to wield strong influence in the health care and justice policy fields. Collective interest associations have had some success as well in bringing such social matters as womans' issues, gun laws and environmental/sustainable development policies to the fore. In comparison to the aforementioned producer groups, however, their organized political base is considerably weaker.

> There should be no doubt that interest groups, particularly cohesive producer groups, exert a significant influence both in preserving the status quo and in promoting manageable change favourable to their interests (Doern and Phidd, p.68).

If the power and influence among interest groups is inequitable in reality, what utility does the myth of democracy serve? The government must, if it is going to achieve anything, make decisions based on who needs what and when under the democratically based rules. At the administrative level where many such issues are resolved, the decisions on the character of the issue, the size, the region, and the attitude of the public affected are just a few of the matters taken into account. Moreover, it is the interaction between citizen sentiments and the political institutions which enhances the power of the citizens and limits the power of the officials toward a particular action. "Pluralism is both the presupposition and the precipitate of democracy. The government doing many things, not all consistent, is serving a society doing many things, not all consistent." (Appleby, p.336)

Frederick Hayek's discussion on "Planning and Democracy" touches upon the same point. Democracy is a means by which to achieve some form of agreement for action albeit not a perfect means. "Democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individualism. As such it is by no means infallible or certain." (Hayek, p.70)

It is an obstacle to the suppression of freedom that, alone, does not prevent power from being arbitrary by its mere existence. When democracy is used to resolve an issue involving the use of power that cannot be guided by fixed rules, it must become arbitrary power. The myth of democracy via fixed rules thus prevents to a certain extent, power from being arbitrary. This prevention, therefore, allows decisions to be made and action to be taken while keeping some form of order intact.

DEMOCRACY CREATES UNITY AND BRINGS ABOUT CHANGE

The myth of democracy brings masses of people together. This unity of common beliefs and shared principles, creates a cohesion among people that continues to promote the ideals of democracy, all the while building commitment and hope in bringing the ideal closer to a reality. As outlined in the last chapter, myth creates a type of synergy that moves the masses. During elections, referendums or public debates, one can often see crowds of people gather to make their points of view known and/or to support their current or prospective representatives. These are the people who are exercising their democratic rights and in some instances, fighting for those rights. In Winnipeg alone, for example, we have recently witnessed major protests against health care reform, rallies for keeping the Jets hockey team, and demonstrations to improve housing on reservations.

Perhaps there is no greater evidence of major protests than those seen in the recent referendum vote in Quebec. In the vote, Quebecers were asked generally[2] whether they wanted to create their own sovereign nation outside of Canada. Here were the people of a province of a democratic nation exercising their democratic right at the risk of breaking up that democratic nation of which they are a part. Quebec leaders for some time had been wanting an increase in provincial powers. When they did not achieve this, they decided that a mandate to negotiate a sovereignty-association with the federal government was the only way to achieve the freedom, equality and ultimately, the power they wanted. The federal Block Quebecois Party championed what many Quebecers perceived to be their democratic right. Some believed the Party put the democratic process of a referendum in place to ask the Quebecers what they wanted. Others would argue the process was used to convince Quebecers that separating from Canada was the only way to obtain the power they long wanted. This is analogous to Sorel's theory: that the illusory image of independent Quebecers became less relevant than the resultant affect or action, namely, recognition and power.

In the days leading up to the referendum, it was evident that masses of Canadian citizens from both inside and outside of Quebec were drawn to the issue and were actively participating. People from both the "yes" side who wanted a sovereign nation and the "no" side who wanted Quebec to remain as part of Canada attended rallies, parades, and meetings by the thousands. A contingent of several hundred citizens living throughout Canada went to Quebec (Lett and Khan, p.1) and free five minute phone calls were offered by local telephone companies so that people could call family and friends

[2]The question was much longer than is being explained here. In fact, some Quebecers were not even sure what the question meant; should Quebec be a new sovereign nation, or a sovereignty in partnership with the rest of Canada?

in Quebec to encourage them to remain part of Canada.[3] In the end, 4.7 million or over 90% of the citizens of Quebec cast a vote in the referendum. This is by far a higher than average turn out of an electorate for political party elections. (Nairne, p.1)

When the very narrow outcome of the election (50.6% for the "no" side versus 49.4% for the "yes" side) was displayed on televisions across the country, the leader of the Federal Block Party (who headed the "yes" side) subsequently announced that his party would respect the majority rule of democracy and claim defeat of the "yes" side. In fact, the Prime Minister and Preston Manning, Leader of the Reform Party, made reference to the fact that "the people had spoken" and changes would have to be made for the province of Quebec. (McKie, p.A2) Although many were critical of the politicians for not saying what changes would be made, changes have already occurred.

The citizens of Quebec are divided more than ever now over where their future lies in the context of Canada. The speech of Quebec Premier Parizeau clearly created a tension between the ethnic groups and businesses, who he blamed for defeating the "yes" side and the rest of the Francophone community. (Warwick, p.20) Furthermore, there has been a change throughout the country in the realization of how fragile we are. Two referendums over fifteen years have resulted in a majority "no" vote to separate Quebec from Canada, but the next referendum could result in favour of separation. (Came, p.18) Again, this resembles Sorel's theory whereby winning the referendum is becoming the end versus the means of a sovereign Quebec.

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[3]Under the heading of "Rallying for Unity", the Winnipeg Free Press advertised on its Saturday, October 28th front page, that "From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. tomorrow, MTS customers can make a call to friends and family in Quebec for up to five minutes free of charge."

The myth of democracy was indeed prevalent in the process to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada. It determined the winner, albeit narrowly, it moved masses of people and brought about changes in our thinking just like wars and revolutions have time and time again. The myth of democracy also remains prevalent in the issues of employment equity and unemployment; the Charter permits certain discrimination in the former, and society continues to tolerate increasing deprived classes in the latter.

It is certainly not unusual to attempt to devise a constitution and create political institutions that reflect more than one vision. But when that attempt is made, as Franks indicates;

> ...it is usually a time of great ideological fervour and rigidity, and not a good time for the rights of citizens or the well-being of the polity. Competing and contrasting visions are an essential component of democratic politics. However, some moderation of the extreme statements of duality and provincial equality will need to happen before constitutional accommodation can be achieved." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.46)

In all these instances, the myth of democracy has not resolved the very issues it created. So, of what use is the myth of democracy?

THE UTILITY OF DEMOCRACY AS A MYTH

Democracy is a form of governance that reflects the characteristics of myths outlined in Chapter 1. As a social structure, democracy provides government with the Canadian Constitutional Charter which guides our daily activities in the areas of Fundamental Freedoms, and Legal and Equality Rights. It both formally and informally, reinforces and maintains legitimacy of the current structure of communication, control and authority within the state.

The myth of democracy also provides an explanation that assists people's understanding of what is happening and why. In the example of employment equity, the myth creates an awareness that certain groups have been denied equal rights. It also explains how those groups' rights should be recognized, and what measures will consequently be adopted. As noted in Chapter 1, when such explanations are shared, people's feelings of lose and fear are reduced (or escalated) by virtue of the knowledge that others are experiencing the same feelings.

It is these commonly shared feelings, aroused by the myth, that can bring about unity in a group, and which can permit a myth's continued growth or eventual demise. The myth of democracy for instance, gave Quebecers the hope that Malinowski identified, and the intiative to take action, that Sorel described.

Democracy as a myth sustains order. If democracy is an attempt to recognize the differences in individuals, it must also provide a means for reconciling those differences. Obvious failings of reconciliation are evident within our aboriginal community which grows increasingly disparate from the rest of the population. Nonetheless, myth can facilitate varying degrees of change through actions. For any action to be determined a process must be put in place to obtain sufficient agreement. According to Appleby, "numerous people will usually be much more capable of agreeing on a kind of action than on the specific form any action might take place." (Appleby, p.335)

In his discussion of Planning and Democracy, Frederick Hayek also acknowledges people are most likely to agree on common action where the common end is not an ultimate end to them but a means of serving a variety of purposes. When individuals combine their efforts to realize the ends they may

have in common, they are, in essence, given their own system of ends and their own means. Hayek appears to agree with Sorel, that myth is more a means than a particular end. Sorel, in the first chapter, identified the prolateriat as so enthralled by their general strike, they eventually lost sight of its purpose. The most important factor was the masses agreeing a strike was needed, and getting people to participate in it, and not what the strike was going to accomplish.

The more agreement there is, and the more consensus there will be, the easier it will be for people to impose the public will and get the government to take action. Democracy, consequently, involves all forms of political processes including elections, as a "means by which in this society {all the} people are continually agreeing on courses of action." (Appleby, p.335) From the agreement stems a cohesion that is created and nurtured among the masses, and which inevitably moves the masses toward change.

MacIver recognizes this agreement as a reconciliation of the common and the divergent, or "the reconciliation of liberty and order. Democracy supplies the form of solution, but the application of it is a task that has no end." (MacIver, p.439) In other words, the myth of democracy provides a means for resolving differences, but does not correct those differences!

No one would argue against democracy's intentions of preserving peace and individualism. As such, democracy, like all other myths, is irrefutable. The principles on which it is based, the Charters it creates, the traditions it protects, the order it maintains, and the masses it moves to agree on a course of action, are all integral to the functioning of society.

Democracy is a myth whose use may be an unsatisfactory method of government except when it is compared to others. As Winston Churchill stated, the very conditions that make democracy so difficult to maintain are the conditions that make it crucial to survival. "To the question, 'Can we survive with democracy'? we must, it seems to me, counterpoise the question, 'Can we survive without it?'." (Barnet, p.25) Maybe we are simply "Too Stupid For Democracy" as Eileen McGann sings in her folk song of the same title (see Appendix A). We repeatedly appear to speak our opinions, choose our leaders and then lose our voice. In the final analysis, however, McGann too sees all the alternatives as worse.

Democracy as a myth, despite its shortcomings, is accepted as the only system we have to follow. Its utility at a macro level as discussed in this chapter, proves it to be an invaluable method for upholding the principles of equality and freedom among citizens in our society while also allowing society to function in a stable manner even when inequalities and lack of freedom can be clearly discerned. The usefulness of democracy as a myth, however, proves to be of at least equal importance at the micro level of government as discussed in the next chapter.

APPENDIX A - TOO STUPID FOR DEMOCRACY
By Eileen McGann

With acknowledgements to Plato, Winston Churchill and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Oh I think we're just too stupid for democracy
Whoever thought majorities should rule?
I think we're just too stupid for democracy
Show me a mirror, I'll show you a fool

Think of the majority of people that you meet:
Do you think that their opinions should be law?
Well, if you're like the majority, you think the rest are nuts
Thus democracy reveals a fatal flaw

Think about the average uncultivated field:
There's twenty-thousand weeds for every flower
And over in the corner where manure's piled high
You'll find the weeds who want to be in power

And every four or five years they will play a little game
Saying "You can pick your leader - take your choice"
And they throw us out a line which we swallow every time
And that's the end of having any voice

Oh I think we're just too stupid for democracy
The democratic world is under curse
I think we're just too stupid for democracy
Though - all of the alternatives are worse:

Dictatorship is full of nasty people who will shoot you
Plutocracy is likewise full of sharpers who will loot you
Oligarchy's full of snobs who snag all the important jobs
Monarchy if kind of fun but still I think its day is done
Communistic theory's fine but put in practice every time
It turns from nice to nasty and I don't think it would suit you
Which leaves us meritocracy
Which always sounded good to me...

Folk singers in the government and all the laws must rhyme
Folk singers in the government, oh we'll have such a time!
Jamming about policy and singing party line...but...
Maybe your ideas of merit aren't the same as mine...

Oh I think we're just too stupid for democracy
The democratic world is under curse
I think we're just too stupid for democracy
Though all of the alternatives, all of the alternatives,
All of the alternatives are worse!

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CHAPTER 3

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AS SUBMYTHS:

A MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS OF UTILITY IN GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER 3
MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AS SUBMYTHS: A MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS OF UTILITY IN GOVERNMENT

Having discussed democracy as a myth and its utility at a macro level of government, it is important to now turn to a discussion of the utility of this myth at a micro level. The Canadian myth of democracy, contains a number of submyths which also provide a variety of uses to public sector organizations. This chapter will discuss the utility of two such submyths; the constitutional convention of Political Neutrality and the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility.

These submyths or traditional doctrines reflect the characteristics of myths as described in Chapter 1. Most apparent is the fact that they are social charters, born from the myth of democracy, and they attempt to identify and determine not only the structure of public administration but also the responsibility and behaviour of political officials and public servants.

The Political Neutrality submyth outlines areas of jurisdiction that among other things, directs politicians to make policies and public servants to implement them. The Ministerial Responsibility submyth dictates certain actions to be taken including that Ministers must resign if a certain error has been committed within her/his department. In addition, these charters generally appear to account for the changing nature of public administration, much like the ability of myths to changing environments, by virtue of the fact that they are limited in specificity and open to interpretation. More of these characteristics will be discussed later in this Chapter.

In keeping with the principles of the myth of democracy in Chapter 2, this chapter will also present the utility of the submyths; their intent in developing a system that is accountable and accessible, and thus, preserving freedom and equality among citizens. Once again, the argument will be made that these submyths are just that; beliefs stemming from a broader myth that is not necessarily practised or comprehended in the sphere of public administration. As Thomas d'Aquino asks, "If government is everyone's business, why is the role of the public service so often misunderstood - by outsiders in particular, and even by public servants themselves?" (d'Aquino, p.15)

Despite any lack of knowledge or application of these submyths', they serve several uses to public sector organizations. Generally, the submyths help institutionalize thinking in government and help justify the current political system. It will be argued that such utility, in large part, is necessary for what Paul Appleby refers to as a democratic morality. This morality, as promoted through the submyths, is a means that "seeks, not the complete elimination of special influence, but its refinement in terms of democratic values." (Appleby, p.344) It is this refinement that makes the myth and submyths of democracy in government so useful.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SUBMYTHS

As the principles of democracy became adopted in Western society and the structure of politics began to take shape, so too did the formation of government and eventually public administration. Public administration for purposes of this discussion, represents not only management, but also leadership in public affairs. In this sense, it means government operationalizes democracy through public administration by executing action that will allow for public consultation and opinion. To that

end, it contributes to the respect, dignity and worth of all citizens. Public opinion is a first principle of government, and "wherever public opinion exists, it must rule." (Wilson, p.27)

According to Paul Appleby, there are two needs for operating a democratic government. The first need is to be responsive to a public concern. The second need is for government to be responsible by identifying officials whom the public may hold accountable for the response. (Appleby 1965, p.339) Based on this perspective, there arose a need to clearly determine who holds power in government and, therefore, who must be accountable for it?

In keeping with the premise of democracy, whereby political officials traditionally represented the opinions of the citizens who elected them, it was obvious that politicians should have ultimate governing authority, namely; the power. Public servants, on the other hand, were identified as those who wielded some power to intervene in decisions made by elected officials and should, consequently, have their power monitored and controlled. "In democratic states, it is not the expansion of administrative power which arouses primary concern; rather it is the irresponsible exercise of that power." (Kernaghan 1978, p.396) But to what extent were public servants to be monitored and controlled? What safeguards would be required? How would this impact on the operations of government?

Such questions and others gave rise to the conceptual doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility and the convention of Political Neutrality. From 1887 to the end of the Second World War, prominent writers in the public administration field began questioning the power difference between political and administrative officials. One such writer was Woodrow Wilson, who departed from the theoretical

concept of policy versus administration by focusing on its practical application. (Kernaghan and Siegel, p.295) In his famous essay "The Study of Administration", Wilson proposes...

> ... that administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. (Wilson, p.29)

Wilson believed that the roles of elected officials and public servants must be clear so as to create a trust among the citizenry regarding what was being done and how. But as government grew in size and complexity, separation of the respective roles became increasingly difficult. In his discussion on Power and Administration, Norton Long notes that if public servants confine themselves to implementing policies and refrain from appealing to their public, they would in essence be neglecting their duties of serving their political masters and the public. (Norton, p.45) What followed was a series of administrative reforms.

Administrative reforms in Canada were initially intended to eradicate patronage from government service and increase efficiencies in order to build public trust. Although certain measures such as hiring based on the merit principle and scientific management were adopted, public administrators increasingly questioned how politics and administration were actually distinct. A reformulation of the traditional roles of politicians and public servants was eventually undertaken in the 1960's. Advocates of this movement argued that public servants were better qualified than politicians to determine the public interest. At the same time, public servants "must, however, establish a value system with a focus on human dignity or administrative humanism; they should not simply reflect the values of their political masters." (Kernaghan and Siegel, p.297)

The struggle for power continued for some time, and many would still contend the respective roles remain unclear or nonexistent. Some promote the notion that the roles are becoming increasingly indistinct and the struggle more apparent. (Kernaghan and Siegel, p.298) Most agree that practice, in significant ways, does not reflect the rationally stated doctrine and convention. (Kernaghan and Siegel, 1995, Kernaghan and Langford 1990, d'Aquino 1984, Cameron 1978, Appleby 1969) Despite the lack of clarity or truth, the evolution of the democratic submyths of Political Neutrality and Ministerial Responsibility have made the operation of government possible.

POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AS A SUBMYTH

Political Neutrality is a constitutional convention that frequently depicts public servants as avoiding "activities likely to impair, or to seem to impair, their political impartiality or the political impartiality of the public service." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.56) As a submyth of democracy, Political Neutrality is concerned about the perception held by the public of how government is operating and if it is, indeed, representing their interests. For the administrative arm of government to be democratic, the public servant must conduct him/herself as fairly and consistently as possible, and in a way that can be publicly explained. (Appleby 1965, p.340)

The fact that Political Neutrality is referred to as a convention denotes there is some form of agreement beyond the level of doctrine that is characteristic of a myth's social charter. It advises public servants not only how they should behave - it assumes, as well, that this is the manner in which they agree to behave. The convention outlines six areas in which public servants are supposed to remain politically impartial.

1. Politics and policy are separated from administration; thus politicians make policy decisions, public servants execute these decisions;
2. public servants are appointed and promoted on the basis of merit rather than of party affiliation or contributions;
3. public servants do not engage in partisan political activities;
4. public servants do not express publicly their personal views on government policies or administration;
5. public servants provide forthright and objective advice to their political masters in private and in confidence; in return, political executives protect the anonymity of public servants by publicly accepting responsibility for departmental decisions; and
6. public servants execute policy decisions loyally irrespective of the philosophy and programs of the party in power and regardless of their personal opinions; as a result, public servants enjoy security of tenure during good behaviour and satisfactory performance (Kernaghan 1976, p.433).

Obviously, the convention is a fundamental component of the Constitution and provides a guideline for public servants to conduct the daily business of government. For example, each of the areas prescribes how public servants should be hired/promoted, be non-partisan, avoid public comment regarding government policies, and preserve their anonymity and loyalty.

The rules contained in the convention also maintain tradition. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Canadian government was organized according to the Westminster model of government, and since that time, it has evolved as a means to organize government in a uniform fashion. "There was a convention of political neutrality of Crown servants at the time of Confederation and the reasoning in support of such convention has been consistent throughout the subsequent years." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.59) The tradition, as inherited from the British Parliamentary fashion, is to maintain a permanent, professional, non-partisan public service.

As discussed earlier, the convention of Political Neutrality provides an explanatory function, not only to the public servant but also to the public. It outlines that the most important responsibilities in a

public servant's role are his/her loyalty, objectivity, anonymity, confidentiality and non-partisanship. It addresses issues of the accountability of political officials, equity in hiring/promotion practices, and service to the political party in power, and consequently, allows the public a level of security in knowing that their interests are being served and protected. Generally, it says that adherence to the convention will bring us closer to having a democratic government.

The explanatory function is important in not only explaining to the public what a public servant should do, also, and at least as important, what a public servant should not do. There is little question that moral performance begins with an individual's self-discipline. But this is usually not enough. As Appleby notes in his discussion on morality in the context of a democratic administration, the "... official individually and organizationally must be concerned to go beyond simple honesty to a devoted guardianship of the continuing reality of democracy." (Appleby 1965, p.344) The convention, therefore, provides the general public with a knowledge that rules exist to limit unscrupulous administrative behaviour.

It is apparent that the convention of Political Neutrality as a submyth, also maintains order in government. Thomas d'Aquino, in his presentation on "The Public Service and Political Neutrality", refers to the high degree of professionalism and integrity in the public service system. While he agrees that modifications to the system may be required, he cautions his audience by explaining that without such integrity based on traditional convention, a chaotic and suspect system would evolve. "A demoralized, confused and disorganized public service is a much greater threat to effective governing than most people realize." (d'Aquino, p.16) Therefore, any reshaping of the public service to meet the goals of government, and ultimately democracy, must be done carefully.

The difficulty in changing the system of government arises from the fact that much of what government represents is interrelated. All the areas noted in the convention are interconnected so that a change in one of them, the political/administrative dichotomy for example, would have an affect on political partisanship and anonymity. Furthermore, the increasingly complex nature of government has made it almost dissimilar from the past. "Responsible behaviour for public officials in the mythical golden age of the Westminster model was rather straightforward." (Langford, p.514) Today, public servants are frequently asked for their opinions, not only by the political officials they serve, but also by the media and the public.

Attempts to accommodate any changes to the submyth are no less difficult than changing the larger myth of democracy. After all, each area identified in the submyth is grounded in the larger myth of democracy. Its submyth's staying power, as a result, is often seen as stronger than its ability to adapt to a changing environment. Does this mean that the submyth does not need to change? Does it actually reflect the reality of the public service?

DOES POLITICAL NEUTRALITY EXIST?

Like the myth of democracy, as discussed in the previous chapter, the submyth of Political Neutrality is not truly reflected in practice. As most writers of public administration have noted, all or specific areas of the Political Neutrality convention are bogus (Langford, p.515), more ideal than real (Cameron, p.363), a deviation from the theory (d'Aquino, p.20), and are nothing but a naturalistic fallacy which is focusing on what *should* be true versus what *is* true. (Waldo, p.43)

The first area of the convention reports that politics is separate from administration. Politicians are concerned with politics and should, thus, deal with the creation of policies. Public servants on the other hand, are concerned with administration and should not engage in politics. They are "apolitical, blind to partisan politics, existing only to neutrally serve the political master." (Adie, p.7) As noted earlier, Woodrow Wilson and others in his time clearly believed that government could and would operate in this manner. "Policy does nothing without the aid of administration; but administration is not therefore politics." (Wilson, p.29)

Frank Goodnow also adopted this view in his work by stating the two functions in government, to express the will of the state and to execute that will, are to be discharged respectively by politics and administration. (Goodnow, p.22) Although this thinking was promoted and perhaps practised at one time, it clearly changed in the early 1900's.

As government evolved, it became evident that politics and administration were interwoven. Public servants were not the automatons the dichotomy professed them to be. The fact is, they were closer to the political process than had been thought by virtue of the ongoing advise they provided to politicians. Furthermore, this notion was positively viewed by managers given their technical expertise and experience. Carl Friedrich argued that the separation between politics and administration had relative value but could no longer be accepted as absolute in its form. Friedrich[1] stated "this misleading distinction has become a fetish, a stereotype in the minds of theorists and practitioners alike." (Friedrich, p.224)

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[1]Although Friedrich did not call the dichotomy a myth he certainly alluded to it as such, and did title its promoters as "myth-makers".

The rationale for Friedrich's conviction was simple. Politicians introduce a new policy; like our current day health care reform, with the primary purpose of containing, and in some instances, reducing health care costs. To accomplish this, hospital emergencies (and in some cases, entire hospitals) closed, staffing levels decreased, and medical procedures were modified. (Manitoba Health, 1992) This, in turn, created the need to monitor the affects of such actions and develop alternate plans for intervention. (Currie, 1993/94) As the policy continues to be implemented, public clamours are acknowledged, consultations are arranged, agreements are negotiated, and other changes to the reform are made. Given the above process, what here is politics and what is administration? According to Friedrich,

> Public policy, to put it flatly, is a continuous process, the formation of which is inseparable from its execution. Public policy is being formed as it is being executed, and it is likewise being executed as it is being formed. Politics and administration play a continuous role in both formation and execution,... (Friedrich, p.225)

There is little doubt that public servants wield more influence and power than suggested in the dichotomy of the Political Neutrality convention. Ministers/Councillors rely on public servants for advice; the very technical, detailed and time-consuming nature involved in certain policy issues obliges politicians to be dependent on administration. (Kernaghan 1978, p.392) Before any Minister speaks publicly about a policy, one can be sure that she/he has been briefed on the policy; including, its implications, it advantages, and other related matters, by a senior public servant.

In addition, the structure of government permits the public servant some latitude for discretion. Not only do their daily duties require decision-making about policies, in some instances they are delegated by Parliament to phrase the language of policies and apply the meaning of those policies. For example, Kernaghan indicates this is common practice especially in the area of regulation

development and enforcement. Of the hundreds of federal regulations made annually, statutory provisions permit "public servants to exercise significant discretion both in the wording of the regulations and in the application of their provisions to particular cases." (Kernaghan 1978, p.392) And administrative influence does not stop there. Public servants are also often responsible for, or assist in, the wording of many policy documents produced by government. Granted, Ministers/Councillors have the final say on policy papers, but public servants can exercise a great deal of influence in the formulation and development of a policy paper, whether its green, white, or even read, for that matter!

Another area that demonstrates the Political Neutrality convention is not truly practised in government is that public servants are appointed and promoted on the basis of merit versus political patronage. Political patronage involves appointing people to government service on the grounds of contributions, financial or otherwise, to the governing party. These appointments remained the strong hold of public service until the early 1900's when public outcries on the basis of moral grounds and a demand for more efficiency in government brought about reforms. The merit principle was introduced to minimize patronage appointments and allowed any Canadian citizen the opportunity to compete for a job in the public service on the basis of their suitability to do the work. "Competitive examinations were introduced and the partisan political activities of public servants were severely restricted." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.59)

Although a significant number of patronage appointments were reduced, they have not altogether disappeared. The federal and provincial levels of government (the municipal levels of government are often excluded due to their lack of partisan politics except the Mayor's senior office staff, who

are appointed by the Mayor), continue to have the authority to appoint deputy ministers, heads and members of agencies, boards and commissions, ambassadors, high commissioners, consuls general and certain other diplomatic representatives, and federal judges. In addition, the Prime Minister and Premiers can select officials for their offices, while Cabinet and Legislative members and councillors appoint their assistants. (Kernaghan and Siegal, p.302-303) These appointments are exempt from the appointing powers of the governments' Civil Service Commissions, and therefore, viewed as permissible.

In addition to these exemptions, patronage appointments continue in the public service. The most popular candidates for appointments, perhaps not surprisingly, tend to be retired legislators and/or defeated political candidates of the governing party. Nick Carter, former Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs, the Environment, and Natural Resources, for the New Democratic Party Government in Manitoba from 1979 to 1987, agrees, however, he also confirms that political appointments are generally difficult to substantiate.

Nonetheless, governments continue to make political appointments because they are necessary. "Ministers ought to expect to have people like them, who are in sync with the ideologies of present government, working along side them.," says Carter. (Carter, Interview) At the same time, Carter calls for the need to distinguish political accountability, namely; between propaganda and technical standards. "Ministers need people around them to support their actions, particularly in the central agency functions, but if these politically appointed individuals do not have the skills required to do the job, then, one is simply raising the worst case scenario of entrenched incompetence." (Carter, Interview)

Aside from the actual political appointees, public servants hired on the basis of merit are receiving increasingly more rights to participate in politics. The convention of Political Neutrality currently permits public servants to engage in "low-profile" political activities, and seek nomination and election to public office while on a leave of absence. "Some recent actions by Canadian courts and legislatures have extended the permissible political activities of public servants ...." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.66) In other words, the submyth has been "officially" compromised by court rulings regarding participation in elections, including the right of public comment.

Political Neutrality, as a result, represents a paradox. On the one hand, public servants are entitled to exercise their democratic citizenship rights, while on the other hand, these rights remain limited to their specific role requirements within the public service. Such a contradiction of democratic rights for public servants, therefore, creates a second category of citizens which the charter does not acknowledge. In Chapter 1, it is noted that Strauss characterizes these contradictions as "binary contrasts" where elements are viewed as diametrically opposed to each other. The myth, in this case Political Neutrality, mediates the contradictory rights of public servants by offering an alternative interpretation, namely; that public servants, in their role as public servants, must serve the rights of their government before serving their individual interests. Although this alternative interpretation appears to be widely accepted and practised, this does not mean it remains uncontested.

Notwithstanding the above comments, Political Neutrality as a submyth exists. The difference between politics and administration, albeit not always clear, assists government officials and the public closer to understanding who is responsible for what. In addition, political patronage is clearly no longer the primary means for the appointment to the public service. Most public servants do not

engage in public politics. The usefulness of Political Neutrality as a submyth will arise again later in this chapter. At this point, the discussion will now turn to the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility.

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A SUBMYTH

Government's ability to influence public servants also rests heavily on the interpretation and implementation of the constitutional doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility. There are two types of Ministerial Responsibility, namely: collective responsibility which prescribes that a minister must support government decisions in public, and individual responsibility which means a Minister is answerable to Parliament for all actions of his/her departmental subordinates. (Kernaghan 1979, p.385) For the purposes of this discussion, individual Ministerial Responsibility will be the focus.

Like the Political Neutrality convention, the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility is a type of social charter that prescribes how elected officials should behave in office. There are two main components of individual ministerial responsibility. The first is that the minister is responsible to Parliament/Legislature for all the actions of the public servants within his/her department. Should a serious administrative error occur, the minister responsible for that department must resign. The second component of the doctrine is that the minister is answerable to Parliament/Legislature for any actions taken within his/her department. (Kernaghan 1979, p.386) This also includes the Minister as answerable to Parliament/Legislature for his/her personal actions outside the workplace such as immoral and/or illegal activities.

The doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility as a submyth maintains tradition. Again, we see a doctrine born from the Westminster model of democratic government adopted in Canada. In the case of Ministerial Responsibility, the tradition maintains elected and appointed officials in government must bear responsibility and be held accountable for government actions. "In a parliamentary democracy, if officials waste public funds, break the law or violate citizens' rights, the public expects that someone will be held accountable for these misdeeds." (Kernaghan 1979, pp.392-393)

This tradition of accountability in the submyth of Ministerial Responsibility also provides an explanatory function for the government administration and the general public. When concerns arise, citizens usually understand who they are to call, and who has the power to take action. In his discussion on ministerial responsibility, Appleby notes that elected officials, not public servants, are in the public eye. If accountability to the public were below the elected officials, "the public would have to guess continually under what shell the pea of responsibility might be located." (Appleby 1969, p.135) However, despite the intent of the doctrine to differentiate who is ultimately accountable, many claim the "shell game" continues to be played in government anyway. There will be more on this later.

Having some knowledge of who is supposed to be accountable allows government to be conducted in an orderly fashion. As Appleby contends, "irresponsibility and democracy are not synonymous." (Appleby 1969, p.139) Someone must be in charge to take directions from the citizens and coordinate those directions on their behalf, to the administration. Someone also must be in charge to explain the actions of the public service.

Through the practice of the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility, the citizens can gain an understanding and appreciation of the rules governing their elected officials and protecting their democratic rights.

As alluded to earlier, the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility is interrelated with the convention of Political Neutrality. Debates regarding the degree to which ministers should be held accountable is rooted in the argument of whether politics and administration can be separated. This is not surprising given this doctrine and convention evolved from the principles of democracy. It is this interconnectedness that makes the submyths' staying power so strong. To change one, would invariably change the other, and to change any would mean changing the principles of democracy on which they are founded.

To hold public servants answerable on administrative issues to parliament, the legislature or council, would not be a vast departure from the traditional doctrine and convention. As mentioned earlier, however, it would be a significant change to have public servants answerable for their policy contributions. Not only would this weaken the role of the minister, the public servant's anonymity and loyalty to the minister would also be compromised. Consequently, "a reformulation of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility becomes a new formulation of relations between ministers and public servants." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.73) A change in the already vague relationship between elected officials and administration, would represent a deviation from the current understanding of what constitutes a democratic government.

DOES MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY EXIST?

In theory, if an error occurs within a department, the Minister responsible for that department is expected to resign - plain and simple. However, practice is not quite so simple. What constitutes "an error"? When does the Minister resign? The fact of the matter is that Ministers very rarely resign, and when they do, it is likely attributable to illegal behaviour and/or a conflict of interest versus administrative mismanagement. Aside from the opposition parties calling for ministerial resignations, "It is part of the record that in Canadian federal politics no minister has ever resigned for an administrative error by an official." (Sutherland, p.579) In Britain, where Ministerial Responsibility originated, only 20 Ministers resigned their offices between 1855 and 1955 in deference to the convention. (S. E. Finer, p.119)

Many writers who discuss Ministerial Responsibility point out that the doctrine is inapplicable, in absolute terms. Administratively, the Minister/Councillor is charged with the responsibility to instruct and guide his/her department in terms of how to administer, implement and otherwise express the policies of the government. (Sutherland, p.580) At the same time, it is virtually impossible for a Minister/Councillor to have personal knowledge of all the administrative actions taken by his/her public servants. "Even to pretend that one man can be answerable, or should be answerable, for 40,000 individual operators, is manifestly stupid!" (Cameron, p.364)

It should not be surprising therefore, to find Ministers reluctant to admit an administrative error has occurred or deny any personal knowledge of or involvement in departmental mismanagement. Moreover, the Minister/Councillor in charge may blame others as responsible for the error. "The usual

practice is that the minister informs Parliament that the fault lies with his officials and he promises that the offenders will be disciplined and their mistakes corrected." (Kernaghan, p.387)

This is what the former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, John Fraser, attempted to do in 1984, after he authorized the release of millions of cans of tuna deemed unfit for human consumption. When questioned during the House of Commons Debates on September 18, 1985, regarding why he released the "tainted tuna", Fraser replied:

> There was no question of health because the product was tested in laboratories in Vancouver, Black Harbour and in Halifax.
>
> The independent committees that addressed this subject all report that there is no question of health hazard whatsoever. What there is is a question of aesthetics and it is not completely objective standard. The report commissioned by my own Department says that the former guidelines were vague. (Commons Debates, September 18, 1985)

Despite his attempts to deflect accountability for his actions elsewhere, Fraser was unable to do so, and resigned shortly thereafter.

Former Minister of Health and Welfare, Jake Epp, on the other hand, was more fortunate than his former "tuna teammate" Fraser. On December 1, 1987, Epp alerted the public, via the media, of a problem with mussels being shipped from Prince Edward Isand. When members of the opposition, however, learned that officials of the Health and Welfare Department were informed of this problem almost one week earlier, they accused Epp of unnecessarily risking the health of Canadians by not alerting them of the spoiled mussels sooner, and called for his resignation. In his response to these accusations during the House of Commons Debates, Epp denied any wrongdoing by stating he was simply following departmental protocol:

> No, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I should resign. Some believe I should resign because I followed the position of the health link very carefully. The instructions I gave the Department are that on every issue we will err on the side of safety. I did not interfere with the Department, or its professionals, with its scientists or with its toxicologists.
>
> What the Member is trying to put forward is so long before health links could be established and that is what the Department establishes. In fact, scientists and toxicolgists were dealing with a new toxin not related to shell fish and fishing, and the Department got the co-operation of the Prince Edward Island mussel growers to pull back the shipments to have to do lab work. Despite that, the pull-back took place.
>
> ...I would like to think Canadians, officials, toxicologists, scientists in Health and Welfare are as interested in the health and safety of Canadians as anyone else. They were not trying to protect an individual. They were trying to protect the health of Canadians. (Commons Debates, December 5, 1987)

Epp claimed that he was waiting for the Department to advise him of the problem mussels even though he knew about the problem when they were being shipped out. In essence, it was **the Department** that caused the delay in alerting the public, not him, even though he was following the health link closely.

While it is unrealistic to hold a Minister/Councillor personally responsible for the actions of his/her officials, and they do not resign whenever administrative errors occur, the submyth still exists. It exists because Ministers/Councillors are still perceived as being accountable for the actions of their portfolios. Administrative errors made public still leave the Minister answerable, and can have potential consequences, especially when he/she can be associated with the error. The Minister/Councillor can be publicly embarrassed, and/or he/she can be demoted to a less prestigious portfolio. Although the former Minister of Health and Welfare, Jake Epp, did not resign, he was publically embarrassed when it was proven there was a delay in his media announcement on an urgent health matter, and that he attempted to cover up that delay. This episode became known as "mussel gate".

Furthermore, Ministers "...will almost invariably be compelled to resign if personal misconduct in the form of unethical, immoral or illegal activities are revealed." (Kernaghan, p.387) Ministers do resign when they are found responsible for personal misconduct. The most notorious case of this was the resignation in May, 1986 of Sinclair Stevens, former Minister responsible for the Department of Regional and Industrial Expansion. The allegations against Stevens referred to private financial dealings with the same individuals or firms that were doing business with Steven's government department, which suggested numerous conflicts of interest on the part of Stevens as a minister of the crown. (Parker, p.xv) As a result of Mr. Stevens resignation and the subsequent inquiry into his alleged conflict of interest, a number of recommendations regarding guidelines for present and future cabinet ministers' conduct were presented. More recently, Alberta Premier Ralph Klein volunteered to resign if he was found guilty of abusing his position to boost the price of shares in Multi-Corp. Inc., a technology firm in Calgary with several Klein supporters and his wife as shareholders. (McCarten, p.A24) The internal investigation found Klein not guilty of any wrongdoing.

The fact of the matter is this; the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility does not determine whether a Minister should be demoted or resign. The collectivity of Ministers determine which of their members is an asset or liability to their government, and on that basis, decides which one is expendable if accused of wrongdoing. According S.E. Finer, whether a Minister is demoted, or forced to resign, depends on three factors, on him/herself, his/her Premier or Prime Minister, and on his/her party.

> For a resignation to occur all three factors have to be just so: the Minister compliant, the Prime Minister firm, the party clamorous. This conjucture is rare, and is in fact fortuitious. Above all, it is indiscriminate - which Ministers escape and which do not is decided neither by the circumstances of the offence nor its gravity. (Finer, p.125)

If a Minister, accused of wrongdoing, is considered a greater liability than he/she is an asset, such as was the case with Sinclair Stevens, than that Minister will be asked to resign. If that Minister was considered a greater asset, as was Ralph Klien, he/she is defended, and in some cases, revered, for having withstood such allegations.

As indicated earlier, Ministers frequently defend their public servants who in turn do what they can to protect their ministers. Ministers, according to the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility, are required to protect the anonymity of public servants who have erred by declining to identify them publicly. (Kernaghan 1979, p.388) The public servant is expected to reciprocate by serving his/her minister loyally in supporting all departmental policies. In recent years, however, elected officials have named and blamed public servants in public, thus placing the public servant in a vulnerable position. Jean-Pierre Goyer, Federal Minister of Supply and Services in 1978, denounced the work of a public servant and said that he had no confidence in that administrator's work. (Kernaghan 1979, p.388-389) The public servant sued Goyer for libel and was awarded $10,000.00 in damages. The court, in this case, accepted the myth.

Another, more recent and controversial incident where administrators were held accountable in Parliament, was in the Al-Mashat affair. In January 1991, just months before the Gulf War, it was alleged that government officials greatly expedited the immigration process for Iraq's former ambassador to the United States to enter Canada as a landed immigrant. When the public learned of Al-Mashat's status, the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, denied any knowledge of the incident, leaving two senior officials to be named and blamed for the incident. In her analysis of the case, Sutherland does not focus on the public servants' accountability for the incident but

rather, on the fact that government supported a full committee inquiry into the comportment of department officials as a substitute for ministerial answerability.

> The use of the political forum to punish officials is profoundly anti-democratic in a broad sense, because it is an attempt to manipulate public opinion using the symbolism of personal accountability without the substance of policy accountability. (Sutherland, p.602-603)

Such action will tend to make public servants unwilling to take risks in the future by forcing them to inundate their ministers with requests for decisions and, thus, creating the need for more ministers and lesser democratic control. It would remove Ministers from being held directly responsible for departmental actions, and in turn, reduce the democratic pressures placed on them through the opposition and the public.

A less dramatic, and more local incident of not protecting public sector anonymity occurred in the City of Winnipeg, when former Deputy Mayor George Fraser criticized the work of the City Clerk's Department by stating he could find more competent employees from the private sector. (Neville and Cheater) In this incident, no public servants were named but the department was left to feel vulnerable enough to join the local CUPE 500 bargaining unit in the event their jobs might be threatened.

Although the incidences of ministerial resignation and public denunciation of administrators are rare, they raise interesting questions around what is going on behind the scenes in government; who is taking public responsibility, who is covering up, and/or who is taking the blame for government's mismanagement? These are questions that have been repeatedly asked, and for which the convention of Political Neutrality and doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility have been created. Both have clearly

attempted to safeguard the democratic process. But if they are not necessarily applicable to current times, or if they are not always practised, what purpose do these submyths ultimately serve?

THE UTILITY OF POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS SUBMYTHS

As submyths of democracy, the doctrine of Political Neutrality and convention of Ministerial Responsibility serve several purposes. The distinguishing characteristics of submyths, as has already been discussed, indicate that they are social charters that maintain traditions, explain those traditions, provide a sense of order, and are generally irrefutable. Further to these characteristics, however, the submyths of Political Neutrality and Ministerial Responsibility are a means to institutionalize the thinking of government and legitimize our political system.

One of the most important functions of a myth or submyth, in this case, is that it influences and guides our thinking. In essence, a submyth creates a belief system that is adopted and shared among the populace. Most of us have at least a vague understanding of the principles of democracy, and how they are translated to government operations. Using this knowledge, we tend to create submyths that allow for the interpretation and application of the broader myth such that it provides individuals with a means of understanding how things operate, predicts future actions, and consequently, unites people into a distinctive identity. This was what Selznick referred to, in Chapter 1, as the "socially integrated myths." The submyths, therefore, provide clear rationale for decision-making, increased security through stability, and a source of emotional energy derived from an identification with shared values.

The arguments for and against separating politics from administration, hiring/promoting public servants on the basis of merit, having ministers resign for their departments' errors and protecting public servants' anonymity, illustrate thinking that is grounded in the principles of democracy and its accompanying doctrines. Political and administrative arguments do not appear to question the content of the doctrines but, rather, how they can be interpreted.

Political and administrative officials seem to accept and respect the intention of Political Neutrality and Ministerial Responsibility. The doctrine and convention are strong traditions that have long guided Canada and other parliamentary democracies. And although they are not without problems, d'Aquino states that the central characteristics of the doctrines must be preserved. Particularly in the case of Political Neutrality, changes are needed, but "more in the direction of the restoration of basic principles rather than the wholesale reconstruction of the system." (d'Aquino, p.23)

Sutherland agrees that the basic principles are what is important in her explanation on the intent of Ministerial Responsibility. Its significance in democratic terms, does not rest in a resignation. If ministers resigned every time administration erred, the government would lose control of departments. On the other hand, Sutherland does not argue that ministers who contribute to a problem should stay in power. The doctrine assumes a minimal degree of competency in the minister, so rather than in resignation, "the democratic significance of ministerial responsibility is in its provision for political leadership of administration." (Sutherland, p.580)

Perhaps the most convincing argument that the submyths have institutionalized our thinking is to look to those individuals working within government. They have come to understand that working for government is different than, say, for the private sector. If one were to ask public servants today about the conventions of Political Neutrality and/or Ministerial Responsibility, the majority would probably not be familiar with them. Nonetheless, they have come to understand concepts that they are not to talk about the government to the media, that partisanship is not the primary basis for promotion, that ministers are ultimately accountable, and so on.

Public servants have come to learn these concepts through the culture of the government in which they work; through the stories bosses and their peers have told, through mistakes they have personally made, through the demands for service from irate citizens, and through an ever evolving understanding of the way the system operates. In his discussions on the democratic public administrative process, Appleby acknowledges the entire process as one shaped by long years of experience and learning under the tutorial blows of the public.

> It is a process in which techniques unnumbered and often not consciously identified have been developed in harmony with the particular, evolving culture for which this process is both a present expression and an avenue for adjustment and advance." (Appleby 1965, p.337)

The Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality submyths also legitimize government actions. They provide us the ability to rationalize not only what elected officials should do but also what they should not do. One of the main reasons political appointments remain a popular tool among politicians is that they limit the public servants' influence on the political agenda, or stated differently, the appointee enhances a politician's ability to realize his/her agenda. Not only would appointees implement and modify policies that are congruent with the political philosophy they adhere to, they

would also strengthen the chain of authority between ministers/councillors and public servants. As Cameron indicates, this "... would for once grant the ministry the control necessary to allow it to answer for the actions of officials whom it had, in fact, appointed and whom it could, in fact, dismiss." (Cameron, p.365)

Furthermore, some have even argued that new appointees would bring a different perspective to the public service and thus, inject diverse ideas into governmental processes. (Kernaghan 1978, p.393) At the centre of the debate, it seems, is the question, to whom is the public servant responsible? Two former secretaries of the federal government have debated this question. Michael Pitfield believes that public servants are responsible to the governing power. Their duty, as he sees it, is "to keep in power the government which the legal process has given them until such time as the process gives them another." (Pitfield, p.7) The growth of the number of political officials in the Privy Council office and the Prime Minister's Office in the 1970' and 80's would lend support to that thinking.

In contrast, Gordon Robertson has argued that public servants are responsible for providing the "best policy advice" only, and that they have no business in the tenure of any government. (Robertson, p.12) This too is evident, in that political appointments in the last decade, particularly among the high profile senior ranks of central agencies and operating departments, have decreased. "Most governments have tended to restrict patronage appointments to the boards and senior management of crown agencies." (Kernaghan and Langford, p.60)

Kernaghan explains the shifts in powers over the past few decades as being more a reaction to policy-making structures than it is to political appointees. As a result, the degree to which political

appointments occur is limited. "... officials dedicated to service of the state rather than service of a political party continue to hold the great majority of senior positions and to exercise the power associated with those positions." (Kernaghan 1978, p.393)

Whether it is through the public servant or the elected official, both of these former public servants appear able to rationalize how best to serve the citizens and maintain a democratic government. Does this mean the Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality submyths will maintain their potency indefinitely? This is not likely. There is evidence indicating these submyths are losing their staying power. In his discussion about accepting the belief that public servants hold more power compared to politicians, Cameron indicates that...

> ... having done so, they (members of a seminar) were ineluctably drawn to the realization that the doctrines or myths which surround and legitimize our political system make inadequate provision for the exercise of political power by the bureaucracy. (Cameron, p.362)

Kernaghan, as a result, proposes that the doctrine and convention be restated in order to be more legitimate. In his paper on "Power, Parliament and Public Servants", Kernaghan rewrites the doctrines: For Ministerial Responsibility, the minister is not answerable to Parliament for all the administrative errors of his department in the sense that he/she must resign in the event of a serious error by his/her department. For Political Neutrality,

> ... politics, policy and administration are intertwined; most public servants are selected and promoted on the basis of merit but some positions are filled by partisans of the government party; ... ministers protect the anonymity of public servants but this anonymity is gradually declining for other reasons,.... (Kernaghan 1979, p.392)

The problem, however, to re-write a myth, is that the effort requires the strong relationship between myth and multitude. People are turned on by the myth, not by its reality. To complain that the myth

does not reflect reality is to argue that it ought to. This misses the point. Myth explains reality; it does not necessarily reflect it.

There is little doubt that the doctrine and convention as submyths are evolving and adapting to the ever changing political and administrative environments. For the time being, however, they maintain a stronghold on government operations in relation to responsibility and accountability. They provide the control and balance needed for democracy. How long these submyths remain the core framework for our democratic government remains to be seen. As Kernaghan states, "Parliament is a potentially important but far from a sufficient instrument to ensure a responsible public bureaucracy." (Kernaghan 1979, p.396) The next chapter will discuss the emergence of another democratic submyth that threatens political and administrative control and is causing an imbalance in government that could reshape democracy altogether. This new submyth is most commonly known as empowerment.

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CHAPTER 4

EMPOWERMENT - THE EMERGING SUBMYTH

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As the pressure for more efficient and effective service on government increases, and as their sources for revenue decrease, governments have to look for new ways of operating. In other words, they have to adopt a means of doing more with less, or in some instances, doing less with less. Successful public sector organizations have three related characteristics that let them adapt to these changes: they empower employees, trust them and are willing to take risks. (Public Service 2000 Managing Change p.32)

This chapter will discuss the organizational theory of empowerment as an emerging submyth that appears to stem from democracy, and which also has several uses in government. It will outline the origins of empowerment, define its application, and in so doing, determine its relationship to democracy. It will be argued that empowerment is a new submyth of democracy, and will identify reasons why it is being adopted. Examples of its attempted application in public sector organizations are examined throughout, along with the barriers that prevent its full implementation.

Like the preceding chapters, this chapter will demonstrate that empowerment as a submyth is nonexistent in reality in public sector organizations, and that it will likely never be due to the competing nature of the Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality submyths. Notwithstanding it absolute existence, the chapter will conclude that empowerment as a submyth could serve several purposes for our current government operations, one purpose of which may be the power to change the democratic myth and its other submyths.

WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

In its simplest form, empowerment is a management theory intent upon freeing employees to achieve their objectives, and thus, attain the overall goals of the organization. Many writers, however, have a variety of other definitions for the term. Some view empowerment as a means of inviting participation, delegating authority downward, flattening an organization, removing commands and controls, and/or generally enabling all employees to make more informed decisions in the workplace. (Gandz 1990, Venkatesan 1992, Bowen & Lawler 1995, Kim 1995, Kerrigan 1995)

Most if not all of the definitions of empowerment identify it as a realignment of power. Kerrigan describes it as "providing power, discretion or authority to employees and allowing them to have more say in what they do." (Kerrigan, p.8) This fundamental redistribution of power deals with the process of decision-making. "In organizations, this is most tangibly represented by decision-making authority - who has the power to make what kind of decisions." (Kim, p.1) Determining who has the power to make certain decisions can create a struggle that is no different than that between the elected official and the administrator who frequently struggle for power.

According to Kernaghan, there are two dimensions of empowerment, the external and the internal. The external dimension focuses on an organization empowering clients (citizens) by involving them in its decision-making process. Inside the organization, empowerment depicts the theories and practices in behaviour and human resource management. (Kernaghan 1992, p.196) In other words, public sector organizations, by the nature of their work, often deal with both the external dimension of empowerment which can be likened to a public consultation/participation process, and the internal

dimension which deals with such issues as training, organizational structure and leadership, and teamwork, to name a few.

Despite many administrators interpreting empowerment to be the delegation of power to their employees, it is more the enabling of employees. It is not a reincarnation of participative management techniques but rather, the inclusion of employees in decisions that affect their performance. From this perspective, Conger and Kanungo define empowerment as...

> ... a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information." (Conger and Kanungo, pp.251-252)

The emphasis in empowerment lies, then, not so much in getting employees to do what managers want but developing conditions that enable them to bring about a desired level of performance that will benefit the entire organization. Empowerment is not spread by administrative propaganda. Employees must decide to pursue it for themselves and they spread it only by their actions. Employees do not feel or behave empowered because the administration tells them are. Empowerment is a motivational concept and state of mind "that enables employee accomplishments through a strong sense of personal freedom and responsibility." (Venkatesan, p.261) Does this not indeed read like the makings of a myth?

Empowerment is extraordinarily difficult to communicate because, as Venkatesan puts it, "the job of an empowered employee is to break the rules." (Venkatesan, p. 261) Osborne and Gaebler refer to this as an "entrepreneurial government" where employees are mission-driven rather than rule-driven. (Osborne and Gaebler, p.110) Employees are provided the freedom to respond to situations, such as

the needs and expectations of their managers, colleagues and citizens in whichever manner the employees see fit in accordance with the mission. In reality, this means an employee should be able to challenge a manager's decision or disobey the guidelines for a particular process that he/she views as incongruent to the mission. Consequently, empowerment cannot take place if there is no trust. "The backbone of empowerment is trust, and certain organizational cultures foster *trust* by encouraging initiative and letting people take risks." (Public Service 2000 Managing Change, p.32)

In short, the objective of empowerment is to make the most use of employees' knowledge and skills. For the purposes of this thesis, we will look at empowerment as a means for creating enabling conditions for employees to share power in decision-making both internal and external to public sector organizations. And although this concept's intent is not new, it is currently being implemented in many public sector organizations for the first time.

THE ORIGINS OF THE EMPOWERMENT ERA

Gandz says "The 1990's will be known as the empowerment era, the age when successful businesses finally take steps necessary...(for) liberating the creative and innovative energies of employees..." (Gandz, p.74) When and how did this era come about? Parallels can be drawn to the Human Relations Management theory of the 1930's and 1940's when it was demonstrated that treating employees as individual units of production was inadequate.

Espousing the need for efficiency in organizations, Elton Mayo believed that there was a relationship between working conditions and human performance, and that mental attitudes of workers played an

integral part in their performance. When he introduced rest pauses in a textile mill and reduced worker turnover from 250% to 5%, he concluded that the more comfortable and freer their working conditions, the more workers' produced. (Wren, p.300)

Although Mayo introduced the humanist perspective to organization theory, it was Douglas MacGregor who revitalized the Human Relations Theory by dismissing the traditional view "as unrelated to the modern influences of the political, social and economic milieu; and as being based on erroneous assumptions about human behaviour." (Wren, p.438) His greatest contribution was not so much differentiating between the "soft" and "hard" management styles, but the need for managers to change their assumptions about human beings, namely: that they could be trusted. People inherently want to do their best in whatever work they do, therefore, management should allow them to integrate these personal goals with those of the organization.

By the 1970's and 80's, theories based on the humanitarian perspective came onto the scene in full force. Management By Objectives (MBO), Organizational Development (OD), In Search of Excellence, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Continuous Improvement (CI), were just a few of the more popular management theories that emphasized employee participation in decision making and workplace objectives. As a result, empowerment includes concepts from each of the these theories.

Some of the pioneers of these theories, Peter Drucker (MBO), Tom Peters (In Search of Excellence), and Deming (CI), quickly became "management gurus", as they travelled the globe teaching their new management ideas. In essence, they are what Malinowski referred to as the myth-makers. They

circulate their messages to different managers, in different ways, all the while reshaping and rethinking their message. If the myth-maker is successful in gaining followers, as were the three just stated, then he/she continues building on those messages through publications and more presentations.

Total Quality Management, in particular, has been popular among both private and public sector organizations in the last decade partly because empowerment is one of its integral components. TQM, as it is commonly known, involves "everyone in an organization in controlling and continuously improving how work is done, in order to meet customer expectations of quality." (Rocine, p.18)

Although there is considerable overlap in the features of the two theories, Kernaghan notes one can adopt empowerment without TQM. Using the federal government's Public Service 2000 initiative as an example, he points out that despite the initiative being grounded in TQM, "it also includes the belief that as many decisions as possible should be made by those employees closest to the clients." (Kernaghan 1992, p.200) Nonetheless, an ever-increasing number of public sector organizations have adopted a form of Total Quality Management through which they are making efforts to achieve empowerment.

In Manitoba, both the provincial and municipal levels of government are involved in Quality Initiatives and Continuous Improvement programs respectively.

EMPOWERING THE WORKPLACE

Accomplishing empowerment within and outside an organization, requires a long term transformation from a controlling culture to an enabling culture. Despite many organizations grappling with the concept and attempting its implementation, there appears to be no clear prescription for its applying empowerment. There appears to be no logical sequence of events that need to occur, and an unclear indication to what extent these changes are required. In most instances, managers reorganize their hierarchical structures, train employees on problem-solving, minimize rule-bound behaviour, establish and participate in teams, change reward systems, and attempt to exercise patience when mistakes occur.

One of the biggest changes required in organizations for empowerment to be fostered, is to flatten or "de-layer" the hierarchial structure. This is done in an effort to move decision-making to the lower level of employees where is it more appropriate. Traditionally, power was depleted as it moved down the organizational ladder. With fewer layers to go through, however, the employees who know the work best can offer the most important changes, and consequently, the "structural change allows more openness in the decision-making process." (Kerrigan, p.8) The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, a submission to the Innovative Management Competition in 1991, stated that their delayering exercise changed their culture and values "from territory, turf and fear to teamwork, trust and delegated responsibility." (Kernaghan 1992, p.203)

The structural changes obviously change the role of the managers and the employees. Instead of adhering to the command and control function, and simply being conduits of information for elected officials, administrators have to learn how to facilitate, train, coach and expedite. One could argue that structural changes are needed due to requirements for new technology for example, despite the intent to introduce empowerment. Regardless of the other intents, they appear to fit the premise behind empowerment. Employees, too, need to understand their responsibilities and accompanying accountability, and how to arrive at decisions. All of this makes training of employees paramount to the success of an empowerment process. As Kernaghan notes in the Innovation Management Competition, "Virtually all of the organizations genuinely committed to empowering their employees understood that training is an integral part of the process." (Kernaghan 1992, p.8)

For example, the winner of the Innovation Competition, B.C. Hydro, developed a framework for understanding the concept and practice of empowered teamwork. In their approach, managers and employees were assigned to work teams and sent to workshops "to expose them to the concepts involved and to enable them to make informed decisions." (Kernaghan 1992, p.203) The Saskatchewan Public Service Commission, another entry in the competition, created an organizational change unit to help promote an empowered work culture by providing specialized services in such areas as department mission statements, values, and enhancing skills in change management. (Kernaghan 1992, p.203)

In addition to organizational restructuring and employee training, managers also find a need to change/enhance their reward systems. If employees are to be valued, trusted and respected, they should receive some tangible evidence of this. While implementing their empowerment process, the

city of Hampton, Virginia, demonstrated the need to change their employee compensation program from one that rewarded longevity, to one that rewarded high performance.

> As a consequence, the city's limited compensation dollars were going to employees who already were being paid above market rates, rather than being spent on recruiting well-qualified new employees or rewarding high performance. (Anfuso, p.38)

Furthermore, compensation systems tend to pay on the basis of a pre-established classification system versus rewarding varying levels of performance, and few, if any, provide for team work structures.

To recognize their employees, the British Columbia Housing Management Commission developed an awards program to celebrate special accomplishments. "Employee achievements are profiled in newsletters and on bulletin boards designated for 'B.C. Housing Heros." (Kernaghan 1992, p.204)

Above all, empowerment calls on management to create processes that encourage participation in joint decision-making activities. Techniques for enhancing participation include: engaging employees in a formal assessment of the organization's needs; informal interviews and discussions; employee surveys; cross-functional teams of employees/managers; employee work groups; and internal communication. (Public Service 2000 Learning From Success, p.38) Injecting empowerment rhetoric into an organization that remains under the former management-control/individual-response model will not be conducive to creating an empowering environment. Such empowerment efforts will be destined to fail, or worse, they will lead to bitterness or disillusionment. (Kim, p.2)

Along with changing the processes, administration is instructed to exercise patience and support for some risk-taking ideas and ventures. This of course, is much easier said than done. Consider, for example, the Barings debacle, where employers around the world were drinking copious amounts of

Malox while wondering just what kinds of decisions their empowered employees were making. (Flynn, p.70) Such "Malox moments" could be particularly prominent in the public sector where managers are not keen on taking risks if their Minister has to speak to their potential failures. At the same time, Ministers often seek out those employees who develop successful innovative strategies to solve problems. This point will be discussed in more detail later. For now, it is important to remember that employees will not participate in decision-making if they get crucified for their mistakes. This is not to say that mistakes should go unnoticed, however; "they should be viewed as learning experiences that signal needs for additional training, a renewal of vision or an explication of required values." (Gandz, p.76)

The benefits cited by organizations attempting empowerment are still anecdotal and rather vague: improved productivity, enhanced morale and, to a lesser extent, reduced costs. In regard to productivity, most organizations state employees have control over the means and methods of service performance and quality of their output. They are no longer "slaves to bureaucratic rules and procedures." (Venkatesan, p.263)

Furthermore, employee self-esteem increases. Inviting employees to participate in decision-making processes, and adopting their ideas, makes the employees feel like they are trusted, worthy and are being listened to. This in turn, helps employees enjoy their work, reduces absenteeism and creates improved labour relations. (Kernaghan 1992, p.205)

It is also believed that empowerment can decrease an organization's costs. Although it is too early to measure the financial cost savings in most organizations, managers claim the signs are promising.

B.C. Hydro, for example, estimated that within five years, their empowered work teams and other related empowerment initiatives "could save 10% of labour costs per year...net of performance-based bonuses" that they expected to pay to the work teams. (Kernaghan, p.204)

Upon closer examination, it is apparent that the reported results of empowerment are flawed. To begin with, what does improved productivity and morale mean in an organization? Based on what empowered organizations are saying, employees are happier and doing more work because they have more autonomy. If this is the case (which this writer believes it is not), how does one measure the value it adds to the organization?

It is also difficult to measure improved productivity, particularly in the public sector where services range from tax assessments to radio broadcasts to street repair. Even if an increase in productivity or morale could be demonstrated, how can it be attributed solely to empowerment? Perhaps, the use of new technology or simple modifications to work processes are actually responsible for the improved performance.

Many organizations that have introduced empowerment appear to justify such actions by making grandiose assertions that they have achieved empowerment and benefited from it without being able to qualify and quantify such assertions in any meaningful way. Although managers say things are different around the empowered office, is empowerment really delivering on its promise? How long will it last?

Another significant and yet least proven benefit of empowerment for organizations, is a reduction in costs and/or an increase in savings. B.C. Hydro, in the earlier example, indicated they are **going to** save 10% in labour costs. Anticipating a reduction in those costs and actually realizing it are two different matters. Empowering a workplace implies there will be monetary benefits. "Today, the imperatives of the business climate are driving businesses to search for new ways to help them to survive. Empowering employees is the most promising." (Gandz, p.74) It is interesting to note, however, there is no research demostrating that empowerment **has saved and/or made money** for an organization. How could it? Afterall, we are talking about a myth!

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE WORKPLACE

Peter Block says that a democratic society cannot attempt to apply its principles to only the broader community. They must be inherent in all the parts of the community, including the workplace.

> Democracy cannot thrive if we only experience it for a moment of voting every two to four years. If day in and day out we go to a workplace that breeds helplessness and compliance, this becomes our generalized pattern of response to the larger questions of our society, and in fact most other aspects of our lives. (Block 1993, p.7-8)

Empowerment is a form of democratization for the workplace. The general conditions required in an organization to achieve empowerment are based on democratic principles. As illustrated earlier, empowerment values freedom for, and equity among all employees, and consequently, strives to benefit the collective/organization versus the individual/employees.

Freeing employees is an important value of empowerment. Employees within an organization at all levels should be free to pursue goals and objectives "without the constant intervention of supervisors and the incessant surveillance of controllers." (Gandz, p.74) This freedom means giving employees the right to speak their mind and participate in making decisions that effect them. This is freedom in democracy.

Traditionally, public sector organizations have been based on a command and control model that stymied creativity and delayed decision-making. New ideas not in sync with the established guidelines and procedures were usually abandoned, and if they were considered, their approval for adoption often outlived the appropriateness for their implementation. Empowerment challenges that thinking in that it allows employees the ability to represent their own interests and pursue their goals by abandoning most, if not all, of the lengthy procedures and lines of authority. This occurs because empowerment, to a large extent, attempts to "de-institutionalize" employees' thinking by encouraging creative ventures and minimizing enervative decision-making.

Democracy can also be literally introduced into an empowered workplace. One company, for example, described its empowerment initiative as based on three fundamental values, one of which was democracy. The president at Semco insisted on making decisions collegially, and consequently, many decisions were made on the basis of company-wide votes. (Venkatesan, p.263) They gave all employees control over their lives by letting them set their own schedules. They eliminated time clocks, abolished manuals, rules, and guidelines including the dress codes. "In short, employees were treated as responsible adults. The reported results were astounding." (Venkatesan, p.263) Sales doubled within a year, and quality improved from a one third rejection rate to less than one percent.

Is simply treating people like adults the same as empowering them?

A similar success was experienced in the federal government's Consumer and Corporate Affair's Trade-mark Examination Branch. The Branch is responsible for examining trade-mark applications to decide whether they can be registered. When the workload started increasing, the director decided to develop a Work At Home (WAH) program for some staff. Staff did as much work as possible at home in return for time off which had to be paid at time and a half. The result was a notable "increase in productivity."

> The WAH program allowed workers to adopt efficient home/office schedules. Immediately, the productivity of the "homers" was double that of the office-bound employees. This was partly because the constraints of any office environment were absent. (Public Service 2000 Learning From Success, p.34)

Is giving people what they want empowerment? Although such initiatives are not suited to all public sector areas, they can enhance the organization's culture by instilling trust between the employees and the employer, and building adaptivity into the system. Like democracy, empowerment allegedly allows employees some freedom of choice, and more control over their destiny.

As mentioned earlier, empowerment is a means of sharing power primarily around decision-making which was traditionally an administrative prerogative. Empowerment appears to be occurring when employees approve their own expense accounts, when inventory personnel approve a bonus for a supplier who delivers ahead of schedule, when customer service clerks take time to assist an angry citizen, when employees stop production when they see quality deficiencies, and so on. In the above empowerment processes, the power to make these and other similiar decisions is simply delegated. As discussed earlier, empowerment is not just a delegation of responsibilities, but a sharing of power among employees throughout the organization.

Other conditions have to be created in the organization to make employees feel they are being treated equitably. Shared power in accountability and responsibility are more palpable to employees when benefits are shared. When employees reduce costs, raise quality, take on more responsibility, upgrade their skills or bring other benefits to the organization, those benefits should be shared and effort rewarded. (Gandz, p.76) Restructuring compensation systems and recognizing exemplary performance of empowered employees are some ways of treating employees more equitably.

More important however, is sharing with employees the same things that managers have. Often, managers forget the reasons they enjoy their work. "Some of the enjoyable perks of management are the ability to implement change, a certain amount of freedom and autonomy in decision-making, and knowing that you have some impact on your environment." (Kerrigan, p.28) Essentially, employees want more control over their work and the same opportunities that go with it. As discussed in the previous chapters, democracy does not always give everyone what they want!

Equity in the workplace also means representativeness. Take the situation of women in government. According to a recent status report, women account for 47% of federal government employees - this is a portion that is generally representative of the national workforce. The problem remains, however, with the vast majority of those women occupying lower-paid occupations. "In 1993, for example, women accounted for just 18 per cent of public servants in executive positions and 84 per cent in administrative support positions." (Status of Women, p. 72) The proportion of women who occupy senior administrative positions in other levels of government is similar. In the City of Winnipeg, women occupy approximately 21% of the senior executive positions (City of Winnipeg Gender Analysis Report). Based on this information, it is clear that women are still not being given the same

opportunities as their male counterparts in the government, and therefore, are not being treated equitably.

This is no different than equity in the broader democratic community. Democracy stands for an equal voice and opportunity for all, regardless of race or gender. Yet, women do not have the same voice and opportunity by the simple fact that they "still earn, on average, 63% of what men do, according to a recent Statistics Canada report." (Kerrigan, p.29) Although women have come a long way in both the government and the private workplaces, it is evident that inequity remains a problem. This problem is not necessarily overt discrimination. "It has more to do with deeply rooted social conditioning and what differing priorities men and women have, whether it be career or family." (Kerrigan, p.29) This notion of differing priorities for women constitutes a myth, in and of itself, that women are less capable because they have more demands to juggle. Nonetheless, with the implementation of empowerment, it is hoped that increased participation of women in the workplace will enhance their skills and grant them the same opportunities as others.

The fundamental rationale for empowerment lies not so much in enabling employees to do their best as it does with the organization, as a whole, achieving its best. As with democracy, empowerment attempts to address individuals' concerns while focusing its primary efforts on the benefits of the collective. If this were not the case, there would be no need for empowerment. Only through the efforts of empowerment...

> ... will we be able to improve our business processes continuously, utilizing both our human and other assets to maximum benefit for the business organizations, employees within those organizations and our society as a whole. (Gandz, p. 79)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, government is being increasingly challenged to increase its efficiencies and effectiveness. In the Public Service 2000 report on Managing Change, over-regulation is considered a waste of time and energy - today's successful organizations realize they can be paralysed by policies and procedures. (Public Service 2000 Managing Change, p.36) One of the major reasons behind managers adopting empowerment - is the hope they can do more with less. This is the hope of a submyth!

One final note in reference to empowerment as democratization and the external dimension. This external dimension of empowerment, according to Kernaghan, involves an organization's efforts to include clients'/citizens' participation in the decision-making process. (Kernaghan 1992, p.196) It calls for the government to reconsider the citizen as a stakeholder in its affairs. In the public sector, this empowerment could mean forming partnerships and various other forms of community/individual involvement.

Evidence of developing partnerships with the community can be seen in the movement toward community-based policing models. Since the late eighties, governments across the continent[1] started adopting the premise "that the police should not simply respond to incidents of crime, but also help neighborhoods solve the problems that underlie crime." (Osborne and Gaebler, p.49) Public safety is treated as a community responsibility versus the sole responsibility of police officers. "It stands to reason that when communities are empowered to solve their own problems, they function better than communities that depend on services provided by outsiders." (Osborne and Gaebler, p.51) Another

[1]In Canada, the City of Edmonton has successfully implemented this model of policing since 1987, and as a result, has been regarded as one of the most effective police forces in the country. (Cassels Interview)

example of citizen participation would be the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources who, in 1990, adopted a strategy from local residents that turned a problematic waste site into a model site while saving money. (Kernaghan 1992, p.196)

For some time now, it appears that government has been losing its understanding of the need to consult the public in matters that effect all of us. And when elected officials and the management have consulted citizens on important matters, it frequently appears only a gesture to say we have been consulted, or a means to appease the interest groups. Nonetheless, the introduction of empowerment seems to be one of renewing the notion of involving citizens on a genuine level - not only on seeking solutions for problems but also, for assisting in identifying problems. This is what democratic citizen participation was intended to be.

> This external aspect of empowerment is similar to higher-level forms of citizen participation, in which citizens exercise real power rather than being manipulated or being involved in merely token participation. (Kernaghan 1992, p.196)

Despite the promises of empowerment, democratic citizen participation has not improved. For example, the former Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, who formally introduced empowerment to the federal service through Public Service 2000, in December 1989, 6 months later, absolutely refused to listen to the people on Meech Lake. When Mulroney finally did consult the citizens on Meech Lake, it appeared very insincere. As Whitaker notes;

> The lesson of the Meech Lake process was supposed to be that elite accommodation had failed to deliver, and that wider participation was required for constitutional change to have any legitimacy...this advise was rejected by Beaudoin-Edwards and Clark-Mulroney...Instead of a broadly representative deliberative body assigned a specific task, agenda and timetable, bearing a heavy responsibility for finding solutions for the country's common future, the government chose instead to pursue a manipulative, sometimes farcical, and ultimately self-destructing parody of democratic consultation. (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, pp.73-74)

Empowerment is a democratization of the workplace. The parallels between the democratic myth and empowerment are almost identical. Both, essentially, are based on the principles of freedom, equity, collective benefits, citizen participation and power sharing. "Democracy is a system for sharing power. As society has become more complex, the problems of relating local authority to national and international authority have grown." (Barnet, p.37) But is empowerment a submyth of democracy? When one compares empowerment to the characteristics of a myth it certainly appears so.

EMPOWERMENT AS A SUBMYTH OF DEMOCRACY

In order to be considered a submyth of democracy, empowerment must first demonstrate that it fits the characteristic functions of a myth as outlined in chapter one, namely that it: is a social charter, maintains tradition, provides an explanatory function, creates order, and is irrefutable. The remaining question is whether empowerment as a submyth exists.

Although there is no one, documented social charter regarding the creation or development of empowerment in organizations, there is a distinguishable set of conditions required to achieve it. Many writers of empowerment identify common parameters for establishing an empowered workplace. Those already mentioned include delayering the hierarchical structure, involving all level of employees in decision-making processes and training, sharing the power of responsibility and accountability, and redesigning compensation systems. Therefore, empowerment does have a charter of prerequisites.

The tradition empowerment maintains can be found in the principles of democracy. If empowerment is a democratization of the workforce, it can than be characterized as reintroducing the tradition of democracy from the broader citizenry into the workplace. In his book Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest, Block talks about the ways in which employees have grown dependent on former organizational systems of give and takes. Because organizations cannot offer lengthy job security these days, employees feel cheated when they are asked to give more to the organization. Through empowerment initiatives like stewardship, employees are offered different choices in defining a workplace that is meaningful for them in other ways. In doing so, they are led to believe that they may reclaim their democratic rights within the organization. "Choice in exchange for a promise. Both important, both offered up front. Stewardship chosen. Democracy rediscovered." (Block 1993, p.90)

Empowerment attempts to explain how organizations might enhance their employees' productivity and benefit the organization as a whole. Much has already been discussed on this so suffice it to say that empowerment serves an explanatory function.

Empowerment does create order. Actually it is more a form of reorder of the traditional organizational systems. At first glance, one might be tempted to say that it causes disorder, and that would be accurate in its initial stages. When the hierarchical chains of command are loosened, there is bound to be a period of disorder as people get accustomed to the new ways of doing things.

According to Kim, implementing empowerment is the creation of a different order. It is not a means of letting go of all administrative decision-making nor is it letting employees make all decisions on

their own. "The path of empowerment lies somewhere between those two extremes." (Kim. p.5) Holpp agrees by indicating that although consistency, control, uniformity and directions are words seldom associated with empowerment, they are nevertheless needed to ensue that empowerment goals are met and that the process moves along. (Holpp, p.55-56) Empowerment still requires a well-defined decision-making structure that includes a method for consciously selecting who makes what decisions and why. (Kim, p.5) Therefore, empowerment as a submyth creates a new order.

Like democracy as a myth, empowerment as a submyth is irrefutable. Offering employees more freedom to do their work in an effort to enhance the overall performance of an organization - who would argue with that? Unions of course, have generally opposed empowerment saying it is just another means for management to take advantage of labour. Such accusations, however, have fallen on deaf ears and have been regarded as typical union posturing. Unions themselves, have recognized that the public sector in particular wastes many resources on rules and regulation. Consequently, it is assumed that little harm could be done if some of those controls were loosened. "The costs of reduced productivity due to over-regulation is probably greater than the cost of mistakes that might occur with fewer regulations and more managerial risk-taking." (Public Service 2000 Managing Change, p.36)

Examples of the waste in government are plentiful. Just consider for a moment, the number of times you have encountered a government office where you did not question the efficiency of service. Public servants themselves, have stories of lengthy, and often, unnecessary paperwork and approvals. Take the following examples as typical: an American official who learned that a routine cable on milk exports required 29 separate signature before is could be approved; or, a Canadian federal official

who was asked to sign an approval for a $1.40 expenditure only to find the document had two other approval signatures on it already! (Public Service 2000 Managing Change, p.36) As a means for unravelling the red-tape of government, empowerment is for the most part irrefutable. Where the empowerment submyth is not as irrefutable, is in its ability to change the public sector culture. Empowerment offers positive results but does it deliver what it promises? Given the strong requirements for accountability and responsibility through the Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality submyths, can the public sector truly be empowered?

BARRIERS TO EMPOWERING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Several of the prerequisites for an empowered workplace have already been discussed. To summarize them, would be to say that the ability to empower any organization is difficult, if not impossible. It takes a great deal of time and commitment from all levels in the organization. The following barriers demonstrate why empower does not exist. To begin with, much resistance to empowering employees comes from management. Everyone is usually viewed as a potential winner in the process except management, especially, the middle management group. With empowerment comes downsizing, and in downsizing the first to go are usually those administrators who lie between the executive and front line employee levels. These administrators are worried about their job security because if they are not making the decisions any longer, why are they needed? From their perspective, empowerment is a threat to their jobs. Who would want to support an initiative that might cost them their job?

Those in management who are fortunate enough to keep their jobs usually remain threatened. Managers are reluctant to forfeit the power that once accompanied their status. As Kernaghan says, "...they may feel disempowered as a result of their efforts to empower others." (Kernaghan 1992, p.206) Furthermore, these administrators may not be able to adapt. Empowerment is a vastly different way of understanding the workplace and it requires adopting new ways of working. "Those managers and executives who believe that it is their function, alone, to organize, direct and control, and who are unable to adapt to new realities...", will lose, says Gandz. (Gandz, p.74) It is estimated that in any downsizing effort there will always be a few managers who are unable perform their new functions. The Federal Correctional Service Department, in its Innovative Management Competition entry, indicated that during its process of organizational renewal some senior managers could not easily adapt. "For all, the change came at a price. For a few, the shift was just not possible. Consequently, some management changes were made." (Kernaghan 1992, p.206)

But administrators are not the only losers. Hequet says this process has also been particularly tough for aspiring employees who are in their 30's and 40's who were working towards a promotion for they are too young to take a buy out but old enough to have adopted the old ways of doing things. Some are having trouble adjusting because they "came into the workforce under one set of rules - and the rules are changing." (Hequet, p.31) This confusion among some employees has resulted in tempers flaring, deadlines being missed, and nights and weekends of work. It also determines whether empowerment is adopted.

In addition to the above internal management barriers, public sector organizations involve other dynamics that hamper the adoption of empowerment. Not surprisingly, these dynamics revolve around the relationship between the political and administrative levels.

To begin with, the size and complexity of government alone complicate the task of empowerment. The political, legal and constitutional surroundings in which government operates complicate any attempts at organizational reform. "The large size and the multi-purpose nature of many government departments preclude or greatly complicate successful empowerment of the whole organization." (Kernaghan 1992, p.208) From this perspective, it appears that only certain departments or parts of departments are able to empower their employees.

In the Innovative Management Competition sponsored by the Institute of Public Administration (IPAC), it was found that crown agencies and smaller administrative units enjoyed more success with empowerment because of their relative autonomy and size which allowed for pinpointing decision-making responsibility and simpler coordination. (Kernaghan 1992, p.208) Consequently, empowerment in government has been introduced and adopted in a piece-meal fashion. Some departments and/or their branches are empowered while others are not. Nothing could be worse than to have groups of employees empowered while their counterparts in other departments of the organization remain working under the command and control model. Why? Because the inconsistency in practice would confuse, complicate, and compound the processes required to maintain the operations of government.

Another barrier to empowerment in the public sector has to do with the initial investment costs. As indicated earlier, empowering employees requires a great deal of training so they can make responsible decisions, learn to work in teams, and so on. All of this takes time and money which are scarce commodities in government these days. Over the past few years, government, more than the private sector, has been slowly trimming its development resources, leaving very little monies for additional training. Furthermore, empowerment's downsizing efforts and increased delegation of responsibilities has left little time for employees to attend training. Without the proper training, how can empowerment be developed in organizations?

The strict accountability requirements of government are another barrier to empowerment. Central agency controls over finances and human resources, for example, impede or discourage the delegation of decision-making power, particularly within the higher levels of management. Moreover, managers are notably anxious about delegating decision-making down the hierarchy, especially when legislators, the media, and public interest groups can quickly turn an apparently administrative issue into a political one. Entrepreneurial governments (if there are any) are feared "because, after all, who wants bureaucrats taking risks with their hard-earned tax dollars?" (Osborne and Gaebler, p.xx) Consequently, senior managers in the federal government tend to have a low tolerance for mistakes and do not readily adopt empowering styles of leadership. (Kernaghan 1992, p.209)

The most prominent barrier to empowerment rests with its incompatibility with the Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality submyths. Empowerment emphasizes a high degree of personal responsibility that is consistent with the organization's goals. Empowerment calls for employees to choose their own course of action and in the case of the public sector, to contribute to

policy development. But how can employees' personal goals possibly be compatible with an organization that is rule-bound and political? It is the incompatibility of the doctrines or submyths, in this case, that Kernaghan claims is the reason why Canadian governments have made only modest gains in implementing participative forms of management. (Kernaghan 1992, p.209)

Unlike the former participative management approaches, empowerment enables employees to make their own decisions. That means more employees than ever before will be making decisions, and inevitably, taking risks and making mistakes. That also means a minister responsible for that employee's action will be answerable for that mistake. As more of these mistakes begin to surface, tolerance and support for empowerment is likely to decrease. "Managers can easily envisage mistakes by creative, risk-taking employees that could embarrass the minister - or the government as a whole - and thereby injure their own career prospects." (Kernaghan 1992, p.210)

The federal initiative of Public Service 2000 recognized this dilemma. Throughout their reports, it is acknowledged that errors will increase so elected officials and administrators are encouraged to be patient. To make empowerment more compatible with traditional constitutions and models, PS2000 suggests the regulatory bodies of government realize mistakes will increase so different yardsticks will be needed to measure performance. "Regulatory bodies should consider the *intent* as well as the *results* of change in any department." (Public Service 2000 Managing Change, p.69).

In order to divert any unwanted attention due to empowerment errors, ministers are emphasising an increase in public servant responsibility and accountability as evidenced through recent, broader government initiatives. Over the last twenty years, the doctrines of responsible government have been under attack in favour of a doctrine of direct administrative accountability. (Sutherland, p.582)

Such initiatives, as the one discussed in the last chapter where public servants were answerable to a parliamentary inquiry committee, clearly undermine Ministerial Responsibility by; allowing public servants to be held directly responsible for their actions; allowing ministers to abdicate their responsibilities to protect the public servants anonymity and be answerable to the public for their department's mistakes. In other words, this means "...that ministers should take political responsibility only for what they did with their own two hands, or directly ordered be done, rather than for all that is done in their name." (Sutherland, p.583)

Direct public service accountability means allowing public servants to be held publicly accountable in the hope they will take more personal responsibility for their work. This reduces the onus on a minister to be answerable to Parliament/Legislature for his/her department's administration. Public servants would be primarily responsibile and accountable for policy implementation, and would be answerable to Parliament/Legislature. As more and more public servants are directed to be more personally responsible, however, this is presented...

> ... not as a shift away from ministers and thus beyond democratic control, but rather as a benign modernization, in which the professionalized bureaucrat will finally be "empowered" to work efficiently. (Sutherland, p.583)

Even if we believe that to be true (as difficult as that might be), there remains one big problem; how does one identify who assumes what responsibility and when? When a team of public servants make

a mistake, who is held accountable? If public servants are to be empowered and then blamed for what they have intended to do in the best interests of the minister, should they be held accountable to the public and perhaps dismissed? Sutherland also contends that de-layering hierarchies through initiatives like PS2000, will not likely make it easy to readily identify and/or isolate those personally responsible for mistakes. "Widely shared authority in entrepreneurial systems does not seem compatible with the capacity for the accurate allocation of blame and responsibility." (Sutherland, p.603) Kernaghan agrees with Sutherland's argument that empowered public servants cannot be held accountable, and that certain ministers during the Al-Mashat affair would not be held accountable. (Kernaghan 1992, p.211) The question than remains, who is to be held accountable? Maybe nobody is, nor has been for sometime. This is acceptable, however, because Ministers are accountable, according to the myth!

The democratic purpose of making an elected official responsible for administration "is to provide an avenue of political control over both routine administration and the implementation of policy by the bureaucracy." (Sutherland, p.581) If empowerment, as described in this chapter, truly exists or should exist, the political control and democratic purpose would be compromised or possibly, discarded altogether.

Some might argue that because democracy is a myth, and therefore, it does not truly exist, it would not be compromised. This may be true, but one must keep in mind; if democracy is a myth, and empowerment and democracy share the same principles, than empowerment is also a myth, and can not truly exist in the public sector. If empowerment cannot truly exist in public sector organizations, then, what purpose does it serve?

THE UTILITY OF EMPOWERMENT AS A SUBMYTH

One of the most powerful characteristics of a myth, or submyth in this case, is the ability to bring about change. As discussed in the first chapter, myths instill ideas and promises in the human psyche, as false as they may sometimes be, that there are alternatives to the current state of affairs. They challenge us to think and encourage us to abandon binding assumptions. Myths are based on a common theme. In the case of empowerment, the theme is an opportunity for employees to think freely and creatively in the workplace. Does believing and adopting a myth truely free individuals' thinking? No, it simply influences those individuals to think another way.

Consider the following analogy;[2] Five people are sleeping in the same bed and each of them are dreaming something different. Some dream in black and white while others dream in colour. The next day, the same five people are introduced to a myth that influences each of them to dream in colour. When dreaming that night, each of the five people in the same bed, dream something different again, however, this time all of them dream in colour. The myth in this case, to dream in colour, allows each person to dream about whatever they wish but, limits each person's opportunity to dream only in colour. Empowerment, like dreaming in colour, is clearly a myth in regards to optimizing opportunities and freedom. It is not conducive to enhancing opportunities but, instead, can limit and/or eliminate them. If taken a step further, the analogy might also illustrate that the colors in one person's dreams remained black and white. This misunderstanding of colour, further reinforces the notion that myth not only limits opportunities for free thinking, it can also muddle our thinking.

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[2]Special thanks to Professor Claudia Wright for this analogy which aids in understanding how myths can limit free thinking.

Myth also provides a positive outlook that usually joins people together. The outlook provided by empowerment as a submyth, is one of hope for employee contentment and organizational survival. Empowerment, as imcompatible as it appears to the current government structure, is being adopted by many public sector organizations. The public sector has bought into the belief, consciously or not, that empowerment provides a positive outlook and outlet for the administration of government. Moreover, it appears to make practical sense. As a result, empowerment can be viewed as the myth for bringing about change.

For the past several decades, the public sector has been criticized for being a bureaucratic jungle of red-tape. There are too many public servants doing too little. In response to these criticisms, government continues to downsize while attempting to maintain the same level of service. For Tamas, this action is contradictory.

> If they don't think something doesn't add up, they're right. Unfortunately, they can't stop the train and take some time to sort it all out. They are working with a stark reality: there is less money, the role of the public service is changing, the budget has been cut, and there are some difficult things to do. (Tamas, p.616)

The current public sector environment, as summarized by Tamas, has left managers groping around for some navigational aid to explain these changes to employees, and make some sense of what is happening. This is where the myth of empowerment comes in to play. Empowerment, as Gandz reminds us, has the potential to bond employees at all levels of the organization in a common effort to change the workplace. "The challenge is to create a chain reaction of empowerment, that develops its own source of energy that can then be harnessed to drive the turbine of organizational effectiveness." (Gandz, p.78)

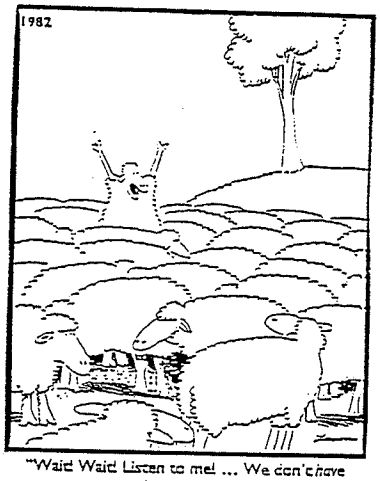
If empowerment cannot exist, as demonstrated earlier, why do managers adopt it? As Selznick points out, executives act out the myth for practical administrative reasons; namely, to help cope with the external and internal demands placed upon them.

> He requires *some* integrating aid to the making of many diverse day-to-day decisions, and the myth helps to fulfill that need. Sharp discrepancies between theory and practice threaten his own authority in the eyes of subordinates; conformity to the myth will lessen "trouble" with outside groups. (Selznick, p.152)

The only way managers can accomplish getting the work done is to optimize the human resources left in the public sector, by giving them the power to do their jobs, and in so doing, hopefully,increase their efficiency. Adopting empowerment or some form of it, consequently, allows the public sector to be viewed **as doing more with less!**

The myth of empowerment is especially evident in dealing with the internal dilemma of staff lay-offs. "How do you rebuild the trust that's so essential for teams when it was shattered by the cuts and is now held in reserve because the staff is waiting for the next round and wondering who's going to be next?" (Tamas, p.616) Employees grow increasingly cynical about their workplace when they face lay-offs, and, at the same time, their managers extol the benefits of feeling empowered. This is evidenced by the following cartoons commonly found in workplace offices.

"We've been reorganized ... so you guys will have to double as mountain gorillas starting Monday."



"Wait! Wait! Listen to me! ... We don't have to be just sheep!"

"I empowered my employees, and then they laid me off because I was redundant."

According to Selznick, myth provides the hope that managers seek in dealing with such conflicts.

> ...he can hope that the myth will contribute to a unified sense of mission and thereby to the harmony of the whole. If the administrator is primarily dedicated to maintaining a smooth-running machine, and only weakly committed to substantive aims, these advantages will seem particularly appealing. (Selznick, p.152)

As a result, the myth of empowerment aids the manager in dealing with a negative public image and employee issues. Franks agrees with Selznick on this utility of myth when he suggests, "Myths and symbols are often a way of passing over and ignoring contradictions as they 'abridge reality'. When harnessed to political purposes, they can obscure as much as they reveal." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.6)

How will empowerment as a submyth resolve the issue of incompatibility with the other two democratic submyths? Sutherland believes that empowerment will substitute the other doctrines.

> ... the personal identity in action - find out who literally did what - is substituted for the much more powerful democratic lines of control of the constitution, which assume responsible delegation from the minister. (Sutherland, p.583)

This statement, however, assumes the current lines of control are democratic. To say that we are deeply democratic in practice is to smooth over the real centralization of power that exists. (Block 1993, p.38)

Kernaghan, on the other hand, believes there will have to be some form of accommodation between empowerment and the doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility and the convention of Political Neutrality to cope with emerging challenges. Given the threatened encroachments on ministerial responsibility and the continuing diminution of public service anonymity, more attention would be better spent on those elements of political neutrality that can be preserved or reinforced. (Kernaghan 1992, p.214)

As a submyth, empowerment legitimizes the current, perceived and real needs of government and citizens to a greater extent than the other submyths. The submyths of Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality support a traditional operating style of command and control that is no longer suitable. "Decision-making becomes more and more complicated as civilization advances." (Appleby, p.345) As a society we need to re-evaluate and adapt our decision-making processes. Empowerment spreads the power of decision-making and focuses it on the need for efficiency, greater employee and public input, and lesser political interference. As Kernaghan concludes,...

> ... public service managers who do not at least investigate seriously the desirability and feasibility of empowering their organizations will do a long-term disservice to their employees, the government, and the public interest. (Kernaghan 1992, p.214)

But while Kernaghan (and many others) may have bought the myth, one should not be fooled. Myths are institution builders, not remedies for improved morale or saving money. "Myth-making may have roots in a sensed need to improve efficiency and morale; but its main office is to help create an integrated system." (Selznick, p.152)

From this perspective, empowerment as a submyth of democracy may modify the other democratic submyths of Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality, and lead the way for what Sanford Borins calls "a quiet public sector revolution." (Borins, p.20)

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SUMMARY

AND

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Democracy is a form of governance we inherited from our ancestors. It attempts to uphold principles of equitable treatment and freedom for all. As a myth, it is based more on faith than fact. Belief alone, however, does not create myth. It is the ever-changing dynamics of the human condition which provide opportunities to reconsider, modify or reject our guiding myths. The argument presented in this paper is that regardless of whether democracy actually exists in Canada, the myth of democracy is extremely useful in the governing of Canada.

Democracy as a myth, is presented in Chapter 2. The chapter notes three societal problems which are facing government today, and demonstrates, among other things, that the democratic myth is useful in obtaining agreement and sustaining some sense of order. Diversity has, and always will be, characteristic of the human race and, in this century, has become increasingly characteristic of the Canadian people. People of different colour, abilities, and socio-economic lifestyles must somehow understand and accept each others differences so that they may live collectively. The myth of democracy allows government to obtain this agreement by recognizing their individual differences, while at the same time fostering benefits for the collectivity as a whole. This is what McNiell refers to as myths that define boundaries.

> Broadly inclusive public identities, if believed and acted on, tend to relax tensions among strangers and can allow people of diverse habits and outlook to coexist more or less peacefully. Narrower in-group loyalties, on the other hand, divide humanity into potentially or actually hostile groupings. (McNiell, p.12)

Democracy as a myth, does not resolve differences it simply attempts to reconcile them. Furthermore, discrediting it as a myth without replacing it would erode the basis for common action, and thus, the capability of living and acting together.

The myth of democracy, as evinced through the submyths in Chapter 3, institutionalizes our thinking. The submyths of Ministerial Responsibility and Political Neutrality create expectations, define political and administrative roles and shape self-conceptions for the individuals who accept them.

Franks notes the degree of attachment to these myths depends on two things: 1) the degree of anxiety the myth rationalizes; and 2) the intensity with which the particular expectation that forms the central premise of the myth is held. (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.65) The myth of democracy generally generates a high anxiety in its promotion of a responsive and accountable government. If citizens expect to be treated, or at least feel they are treated, fairly and equitably, government must conduct itself accordingly. The submyths rationalize how this is to be done, through the roles and procedures it outlines, and the subsequent explanations it provides. This, in turn, lends strong support for the central premises of the democratic submyths. Citizens, politicians and public servants alike have a general understanding of the consistency of government practice.

Herein, lies one of the dangers of the democratic myth. As Canadians, we appear to be obsessed with a myth, and consequently, treat it as our basis for reality. For example, "The Canadian obsession with constitution making embodies a particularly dangerous romantic myth - that constitutions and constitution-changing can solve political problems." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, pp.66-67) As demonstrated earlier, democracy as a myth does not solve problems of equity, unemployment

or nationalism, it simply reconciles them. Yet we continue to treat it as though it is a panacea for several of our governmental problems.

This problem raises another utility of myth, which is to bring about change. The feedback between myth and reality is usually in constant balance. A disruption of or discontentment with this balance, as we are witnessing with the democratic submyths, provides opportunities to destroy and reconstruct myth. Although it has been suggested that the submyths be modified to reflect current practice, so far only a few political thinkers have indicated that their roles are no longer required, and/or have suggested a viable alternative. Nonetheless, "...when actions undertaken in accordance with accepted ideas fail to achieve anything like the expected result, it is time to reconsider the guiding myth, amending or rejecting it as the case may be. (McNiell, p.2)

This reconsideration of the myth is what added empowerment to the submyths of democracy. As Chapter 4 argues, it is a new way of perceiving governmental operations and functions in that it attempts to redefine goals and procedures. It is a new myth necessitated by the challenges facing government today. The democratic myth is increasingly unable to explain the events around us, so we look for a new myth that will. In the absence of that new myth, we simply modify, add or delete from the old myth. "...Democracy is the only legitimating principle of government in the historical era into which we are moving because all the alternatives are even more unsatisfactory...", (Barnet, p.30) Empowerment, therefore, is an added principle for adapting democratic ideology to the realities of an ever-evolving society.

As a submyth, empowerment appears to aid those who are groping for new means to rationalize and justify what is happening. Substantial cynicism has developed over government's commitment to democracy - mass lay-offs, increasing taxes, off-loading from federal to provincial jurisdictions, and so on, have all contributed to societal and public servant feelings of self-helplessness, and public sector organizational decay. "One reason is that harder work for more pay no longer motivates workers when the pay disappears in inflation and the worker comes to see himself as a mere extension of a machine." (Barnet, p.34) Empowerment as a submyth puts a new face on democracy, that although cosmetic, offers society hope for the future. As Selznick indicates, we need myths now more than ever. "Successful myths are never merely cynical or manipulative, even though they may be put forward self-consciously to further the chances of stability or survival." (Selznick, p.151) From this perspective, myth plays an essential role in maintaining organizations.

Myths develop agreement, gain acceptance through education or acculturation, and bring about and manage change. Apart from these valuable uses, myths also create collective action in an attempt to integrate various systems within the whole. As indicated in the last chapter, while myth-making may focus on improving efficiency and morale, its main utility is to create an integrated social organism. In the absence of a believable myth, "coherent public action becomes very difficult to improve or sustain."(McNeill, p.2)

Democracy, on the other hand, is a system of government intent on valuing individual respect and dignity. Such dignity is difficult to attain without actively participating in the process of democracy. And with the onslaught of technology, this participation in democracy is becoming an increasingly isolated activity. "The audio-visual mass media, by opening a path into private homes where aspiring

candidates may sell themselves to the voting public, do even more to insulate the electoral process from administrative realities."(McNiell, p.4) Consequently, one of the most important utilities of a myth, is its practical contribution in practice, in this case the practice of democracy, and in this, restoring people's sense of self. As Barnet states, "Without a proper intimation of individual worth, human beings cannot locate themselves in a puzzling universe." (Barnet, p.40)

Canada is said to be one of the most successful and prosperous democracies of the world. The United Nations, for example, considers Canada one of the best countries in which to live. Yet, the myth of democracy and its current interpretation pose a different view; one that indicates a disillusionment with democracy, its values, its doctrine, and its convention, and its increasing lack of apparent application in practice.

On the other hand, this disillusionment may be the precursor to a myth switch, or an entire transformation to a new myth. Whatever the case may be, the crucial point about myths "is not that they describe the past, or explain the present, but that they define and create the future." (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, p.68)

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