Making Memory in State Government: Fighting the Effects of High Administrative

Turnover with Participatory Evaluation Approaches

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Abstract

State government agencies face a unique challenge: frequent, regular turnover of top administration, in concurrence with the election cycle. However, there is little current research on the effects of administrative turnover in state government specifically. Several trends can be observed in the public sector that may be exacerbated by high administrative turnover: weak organizational learning, low levels of organizational memory, lack of encouragement of capacity building from management, and negative behavior of disempowered government workers. There is also a gap in the literature regarding the influence of evaluation on state government work, and whether it can help with the observed organizational trends. This paper examines whether participatory evaluation approaches can combat loss of organizational memory and learning in the turbulent environment of state government agencies.

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State government agencies face a unique challenge that private organizations do not: frequent, regular turnover of top administration. Every four to eight years the state elects a new governor, and he or she appoints a new head of every agency. I will refer to "administrative turnover" throughout this paper, which means the transition of leadership from one executive to another as a result of the electoral system (Orosz, 1994). Some agency heads are elected, but most are appointed. For example, in 2014, 38 of the 51 chief state school officers in the United States and District of Columbia were appointed (Jacobson, 2014).

Whether the official is elected or appointed, new management in an organization tends to be disruptive (Haas and Wright, 1989; Orosz, 1994; Rainey and Wechsler, 1988). However, despite a substantial body of literature on corporate executive tenure's influence on corporate performance and stockholder wealth (Reinganum, 1985; Puffer and Weintrop, 1991) there is little current research on the effect of regular administrative turnover on personnel knowledge retention and management in state government specifically. In particular, there is little research regarding the effect of turnover on organizational capacity and the effect of turnover on evaluative processes that may influence organizational capacity. Evaluative processes that produce knowledge about areas of weakness might be essential to organizational learning, but may be adversely affected by administrative turnover.

A few organizational behavior trends have been observed in state government. First, agencies tend to react to new developments instead of reflect upon and learn from them. This can be detrimental to an organization's performance, as an organization that merely adapts in the face of new information is not necessarily learning; rather, a learning

organization improves its actions through better knowledge and understanding (Fiol and Lyles, 1985).

Second, agency management does not often encourage organizational capacity building and reflective practice. Getting an organization to begin performing systematic inquiry requires a shift in organizational culture, which can be very difficult (Cousins and Earl, 1995). Often, organizational culture will not shift without buy-in from management to give credibility to an initiative (Keiny and Dryfus, 1993).

A pattern of weak organizational learning and low capacity would be worrisome even in a stable work environment, but state government is anything but stable. The periodic disruptive effects of the election cycle and related administrative turnover can influence the behavior of government workers who have experienced many different managers over the years. High administrative turnover can cause policy discontinuity, which disrupts workers' projects (Haas and Wright, 1989). Rainey and Wechsler found instances of tension between incoming and outgoing administrations and hostile behavior and anxiety from personnel in cases of high turnover. This cycle precludes long-term change and innovation (Rainey and Wechsler, 1988). As an employee of a state government agency for the past several years, I have observed many of these trends.

Researchers have found that high turnover can weaken organizational capacity. There has also been a substantial amount of research regarding the use of evaluation approaches that seek to build capacity and strengthen learning in organizations. A question that arises is whether the use of evaluation to build capacity and strengthen learning is sufficient to combat the effects of administrative turnover. Although the use of participatory evaluation has been advocated as a means of building evaluation capacity, it

is unclear whether participatory approaches to evaluation are consistently implemented in state government agencies that endure staff turnover at regular four- to eight-year intervals, and it is unclear what happens to the knowledge that accumulates from utilizing those approaches. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the following research questions:

- What processes can an organization undertake to enhance organizational learning and evaluative thinking?

- What is the connection between evaluation approaches and building organizational learning and memory, and do these approaches provide resilience in cases of high turnover?

- What does the research say about the impact of administrative turnover on organizational learning and evaluative thinking in the private or non-profit sectors, and can the lessons learned be transferred to the public sector?

The research suggests that evaluation approaches that promote enhanced use of results and influence behavior are most likely to lead to organizational change and learning, so this review aims to identify approaches that appear to build organizational memory, learning and knowledge retention, and to analyze ways those approaches might increase the resilience of state government agencies.

Section 1

Organizational Memory and Learning

E.W. Stein (1995) defines organizational memory as "the means by which knowledge from the past is brought to bear on present activities." An organization's memory consists of more than every individual's memory; it is more than the sum of its parts. Rather, it is like Emile Durkheim's "collective consciousness," composed of individual minds that share information through the exchange of symbols. Individuals maintain the values, norms, and images of an organization, while an organization can transmit information from past to future members through their memories. Hedberg (1981) suggested that although organizations do not have brains, they have cognitive systems and memories. Just as individuals develop personalities and worldviews over time, so do organizations, because their memories preserve and reinforce certain behaviors.

Organizational Memory

Social systems are naturally resistant to change, and organizational memory can be a barrier to change at times (Stein, 1995). Stein acknowledges that organizational memory can result in "higher or lower levels of organizational effectiveness." By referring to this variability in effectiveness, Stein points out that organizational memory is not a cure-all; in fact, it can hold an organization back. However, he argues that an organization can benefit from cultivating its memory in several ways. It can:

- Help managers maintain strategic direction over time.
- Help organizations avoid cycling through old solutions to new problems because no one can remember what was done before.
- Give new meaning to the work of individuals.

- Facilitate organizational learning.
- Strengthen organizational identity.
- Provide newcomers access to the expertise of those who preceded them.

Organizational memory refers to more than just accumulated knowledge. According to Stein (1995), it functions as a process that may be non-cognitive, and contains four defining steps: acquisition, retention, maintenance, and retrieval (p. 26). Why would an organization want to retrieve knowledge stored in its memory? Stein offers four possible reasons:

- The inquirer values what has been done in the past.
- The information exists and the inquirer knows it exists.
- The inquirer can search for and decode the information.
- The cost to locate the information is less than re-computing it from scratch.

Considering the substantial commitment of time and money often involved in organizational initiatives, including evaluation, it would almost certainly be more cost effective to retrieve memory of past findings then to redo an entire project. Past findings are also useful in creating better results in the future.

Scholars have attempted to conceptualize or model organizational memory with limited success. Van Rensburg (2011) argues that memory is contained in "directories" that can be stored electronically or housed physically within the minds of individuals who have worked for the organization a long time. Drawing on those individuals' experiences, relationships and knowledge is an indispensable part of organizational memory. Walsh and Ungson (1991) describe five directories—essentially, storage bins for memory—to which Olivera (2000) later added information technology. Walsh and Ungson's storage bins included:

- The individuals who work for the organization.
- The organization's culture, which includes shared frameworks.
- Standard operating procedures and practices.
- Roles and organizational structures.
- The physical structure of the workplace.

However, Spender (1996) argues that past views of organizational knowledge, learning, and memory—particularly Walsh and Ungson's storage bins—are naively positivistic. I agree; we cannot hope to categorize and map out the tacit and non-cognitive processes of the human mind using physical, mechanical terminology like "bins" or "facilities." Spender also cautions scholars against considering organizational knowledge, learning and memory as three separate processes. Indeed, these concepts and our use of them are interconnected and do not always proceed linearly.

Researchers who point out the drawbacks of maintaining organizational memory suggest that it could lead to bureaucratic entrenchment, tunnel vision, and failure to acknowledge that things have changed. Others see the value in learning from past successes and failures, and of compiling a conglomeration of collective experience (Johnson and Paper, 1998). In a best-case scenario, an organization will have systems in place for storing both organic and constructed memory. Organic memory consists of the experiences and lessons learned that workers store in their minds, while constructed memory is the physical or electronic documentation of past success and failures (Johnson, 1993).

In a knowledge organization such as a state government agency, the organization's performance depends on the knowledge and experience of its workers. According to a model developed by Carley (1992), even hiring knowledgeable and experienced personnel cannot overcome the decrease in a complex organization's

performance caused by employee turnover. In contrast, a more structured type of business like a restaurant or manufacturer's assembly line has simple, established roles and routines. These roles and routines are part of Walsh and Ungson's "storage bins" of an organization's memory. As Rao and Argote (2006) suggest, roles and routines can enable organizational knowledge to persist through time, even in the face of employee turnover. Therefore, they have an easier time cultivating organizational memory, but have less need for it. According to Rao and Argote, organizations with clearly defined roles and standard operating procedures and routines—where workers are little more than cogs in the machine—would suffer least in the face of high turnover. Establishing rigid roles and routines would be less effective in a complex organization that depended more on workers' accumulated knowledge, education and expertise, such as a government agency.

Organizational Learning

Scholars continue to debate the connection between organizational memory and the concept of organizational learning. They often refer to them in tandem (Spender, 1996; Stein, 1995), but few studies have conclusively demonstrated such a connection. Jackson (2007) wrote that organizational learning occurs when knowledge is spread through the organization through memory, but Spender (1996) might question this since it creates a chicken-and-egg scenario: if knowledge springs from memory, where did the first memory come from? On the other hand, Stein suggested that organizational learning is a necessary condition for memory and memory is likewise essential to organizational learning.

Weick (1991) defined organizational learning as a changed response to the same stimulus, where knowledge arises not from a new development, but from the same pattern, reacted to in a different way. Weick's concept of learning is "the displacement of what was known previously rather than the development of something new."

Fiol and Lyles' (1985) initial definition of organizational learning incorporated organizational improvement in addition to change or adaptation. They defined the concept as the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding. Their position echoes others' (Hedberg, 1981; Stein, 1995) views on memory: that organizational learning is more than the sum of each individual's learning. Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 804) posited four contextual factors that are integral to organizational learning:

- *Culture.* Organizational norms and beliefs can determine strategy. Changing an organization often means changing its culture.
- *Strategy.*
- *Structure.* Top-down rigid structure reinforces past behaviors. Open, organic structure allows shifting beliefs and actions. This becomes a debate between the efficiency of the top-down structure and the adaptability of the open structure.
- *Environment.* To be most conducive to learning, an organization needs a balance between stability and openness to change.

As Fiol and Lyles' contextual factors suggest, organizational memory plays a role in the flexibility or stability of the organization. Stein (1995) built on these contextual factors by suggesting that organizations must find the right balance between flexibility and stability. In striking this balance, one must ask: do the lingering effects of past organizational behaviors or structures help them to be more effective or hold them back? Does organizational memory cause workers to refuse to change, because "this is how

we've always done it"? In the case of a top-down, rigidly hierarchical organization structure, the memory of established positions of authority and subordination might echo in any future interaction between coworkers once the organization attempts to change. Ingrained memory can at once hold an organization back from implementing change and help it recover from turnover; one of Stein's (1995) benefits was helping organizations avoid cycling through old solutions because no one can remember what was done before. I argue that organizational memory is a desirable outcome; my experience working in state government has led me to believe that the danger of repeating the same mistakes far outweighs that of resisting change. All complex systems resist change. But not all consistently undermine their stores of knowledge by not learning from the past.

Is an organization still the same entity if it experiences loss of memory through staff turnover? Stein (1995) suggested that an organization is still the same even though many parts of it have changed over the years, as long as it retains some essential components. I argue that an organization's most essential components are its purpose and values, which it retains in case of turnover. Organizations exist to carry out a certain purpose, to fulfill an agreed-upon mission, and to do so in ways that reflect their values. If its personnel and location changes, the organization is still the same. But once its purpose or values change, it is no longer the same entity. Even so, every time one of those components is altered, its memory may be affected (Stein, 1995, p. 18).

Although scholars have had difficulty modeling organizational memory and learning, most agree that improving actions through better knowledge and understanding and avoiding cycling through old solutions to new problems are beneficial to an organization. It is often more cost effective to draw upon knowledge gained from past

projects than to redo an entire project. In a knowledge organization, like in state government, the organization's success depends on its workers' knowledge and experience, which is stored as organizational memory and reinforced and accumulated by organizational learning. When high turnover occurs in knowledge organizations, learning and memory is not as robust, and the organization's performance may suffer.

Section 2

Evaluation Approaches

Stakeholder, participatory, and collaborative approaches to evaluation are now more the norm than the exception (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009). These approaches emphasize the importance of the intended user of the results, who may also be the one conducting the evaluation, provided they have the capacity. Evaluation capacity building entails an evaluator working with internal organization members to help them develop their own evaluation knowledge and skills. It requires workers to take on the responsibility of "asking evaluative questions, seeking information to answer those questions, making decisions based on the answers, and taking action to implement the recommendations" (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009). With the rise of participatory approaches, it makes sense for workers within a program to develop skills to evaluate their own work. Capturing the knowledge that is created from evaluation capacity building is essential if a knowledge organization is to improve in its use of evaluation (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009).

Though knowledge organizations like state government agencies employ intelligent, highly skilled workers, the organization may not always use employee involvement and empowerment strategies to draw upon this reservoir of knowledge when making organization-level decisions. Empowerment means the act of helping those without power to empower themselves. The disempowered are, in many cases, the non-managerial workers in an organization. In their 1998 study, Johnson and Paper explored the connection between worker empowerment and organizational memory. The two

concepts are interconnected: empowerment can lead to organizational memory and organizational memory can, in turn, lead to empowerment.

They defined empowerment as "the extent to which decisions and decision-making authority are pushed down to workers closest to core business processes where the work is actually done" (Johnson and Paper, 1998). They also offered a couple of definitions of organizational memory from the literature: "organizational knowledge with persistence" (Ackerman, 1994), and "knowledge, learned from past organizational experience, that can be brought to bear on present decisions" (Johnson and Paper, 1998). A number of criteria have to be satisfied for empowerment to take hold in an organization, including the commitment of top leadership to helping workers empower themselves. The authors also acknowledged a drawback to empowering workers: it can cost organizations in the area of worker productivity, since decentralized work can lead to missed deadlines and disorganization.

Empowerment evaluation is an approach related to the concept of the empowered worker. In this approach, the relationship between the evaluator and the evaluated is collaborative, in much the same way as the empowered worker collaborates with rather than receives tasks from an autocratic manager. According to Fetterman (1996), the collaborative evaluation process leads to more meaningful and useful results. However, the organizational development theorists Cummings and Worley (2014) point out that "employee empowerment" focuses too much on the power aspects of a workplace. They recommend implementing employee involvement strategies, which provide the additional skills, training, and support workers need in addition to becoming empowered. There has been some debate about how or whether this approach differs from other stakeholder-

based evaluation approaches, such as participatory or utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1997).

In the 1980s, the discussion about utilization in evaluation was largely informed by Weiss (1988a) and Patton (1988a). Weiss (1988a) maintained that in non-rational (i.e., political) and pluralistic use contexts, the most an evaluator can and should strive for is findings that are accurate and adequate for the evaluation question. Patton (1988a) suggested that evaluators should pursue an active role in promoting and cultivating the use of evaluation findings (Shulha and Cousins, 1997). Patton acknowledged that evaluations and programs are complex, so an evaluator cannot simply apply a standard best practice to every program or situation regardless of context. With the rise of utilization-focused evaluation, evaluators designed custom evaluations specifically so clients would use the results. The evaluation became a continuous exchange of information between the program participants and the evaluator, who shared responsibility for creating, communicating, and consuming evaluation information.

More recently, discussion of use in evaluation has been about context. As Weiss said, some contexts are more logical than others. A logical evaluation context is one where a set of options and a goal are presented, and the evaluator is asked what should be done. A logical context requires a different attitude toward use of results than, for example, a political context, where there are more influences and attitudes to consider than the logical process (Shulha and Cousins, 1997). In state government programs, the well-articulated options and goals that do exist to be evaluated are often quite political. They have been the subjects of debates over funding in the legislature and policy debates at the agencies. Guba and Lincoln (1989) challenged the idea that evaluation should be as

logical and scientific as Weiss suggested. Ever the constructivists, they argued that evaluation participants are creating reality, and the very act of evaluating is "use". Evaluation is a way for the actors involved in the situation to make sense of what they experience.

Guba and Lincoln's (1989) constructivist view shares characteristics with Fetterman's empowerment evaluation, namely, that participation promotes utilization of the evaluation findings and the action that occurs after or because of the findings of the evaluation is of utmost importance. Fetterman might also add that process use—where value is derived from the evaluation process itself—is empowering. I argue that process use liberates—to use the language of empowerment—workers from their pre-evaluative thinking states to become members of a learning organization. Much of the research around process use has been conducted to analyze the influence of particular evaluation designs and practices on individual and organizational learning. (Keiny and Dryfus, 1993). As Weick (1991) said, organizational learning occurs when workers react differently to the same information. Whereas workers might have once reacted to summative results of an external program evaluation with frustration or apathy, after participating in an empowering evaluation process they might see those results as an opportunity for reflection and change.

Critics of evaluation use, like Davies (1999), argue that governments do not use evaluations because they are not useful in any way. Reports are too long and complex, findings are not timely enough to be relevant, and they often cost too much money. The field appears to be responding to perceived lack of use since Davies' paper was published, and utilization theory was a well-established area of study in 1999. He refers

to "goal displacement," or forgetting the program's reason for being, as something that can happen in performance management. An organization might be experiencing goal displacement when they forget to consider the intended use by intended users (Patton, 2008). Davies also seems to argue against evaluating for evaluation's sake, saying that you cannot force either evaluation or performance management on unwilling people. It follows that there must be a shared goal and sense of collaboration, or a shared desire to improve the program at hand. Often, the process of collaborating to improve the program is just as important as the end result.

Patton (2008) has long been a proponent of process use. Patton says that evaluation can be a cross-cultural experience, a genuine culture-sharing experience that the non-evaluators view as enriching. In undesirable instances it could be imperialistic, such as when an evaluator tries to shape a project around his or her values instead of those of the group. This aligns with Jenlink (1994), who wrote that there could be clashes between the evaluator and program staff cultures, in addition to other obstacles to genuine stakeholder participation in complex organizations. When close connections between evaluator and program community exist, however, they can enhance use of evaluation findings (Jenlink, 1994). The essence of process use is that the value participants derive from the process of evaluation may have more lasting impact than a summative set of findings about a program. Findings aren't useful for long; in a swiftly changing world, "learning to think and act evaluatively can have an ongoing impact" (Patton, 2008, p. 153). Patton describes a variety of types of process uses:

- Infusing evaluative thinking into an organization's culture.
- Enhancing shared understandings.
- Supporting and reinforcing the program through intervention-oriented evaluation.

- Instrumentation effects (what gets measured gets done).
- Increasing participants' engagement, sense of ownership, and self-determination (participatory and empowerment evaluation).
- Program or organizational development.

Getting an organization to begin performing systematic inquiry requires a shift in organizational culture, which can be very difficult (Cousins and Earl, 1995). Often, as Keiny and Dryfus (1993) suggest, organizational culture will not shift without buy-in from management to give credibility to the initiative. If participatory approaches do take place, it has been observed that participation enhances workers' learning, confidence, and sense of ownership of results. When a group has not been working together long or are doing a project they have never tried before, it can be difficult to make decisions. According to Patton (2008), establishing a logical, evaluative way of decision-making can be valuable to a team, because otherwise people might depend on untested beliefs or generalities as the basis for action (p. 153).

Patton often convinces clients of the value of evaluation by saying they may also develop skills in so-called "reality testing" that they can apply in other areas of professional or personal life (Patton, 2008). I agree that a logical decision-making process is valuable, but would add that drawing on the memory of past experiences is a legitimate part of making decisions as a team, whether the team members share those experiences or not. Drawing upon memory may not be as rigorous as making a research-based decision, but it is one of the primary ways people work. This might involve learning from long-time workers who pass down their knowledge to newer employees. As Stein (1995) said, one of the benefits of cultivating organizational memory is to provide newcomers access to the expertise of those who preceded them. And drawing on individual's experiences,

relationships and knowledge is an indispensable part of organizational memory (Van Rensburg, 2011).

Ebrahim (2005), writing about accountability in the non-profit sector, discussed the purpose and relevance of conducting internal evaluations to assess performance results of indicators put forth either by outside entities like donors, or by organization staff, i.e., their goals and mission. In a study of 140 non-profit organizations who conducted program evaluations, Fine, Thayer, and Coghlan (2000) found that 56 percent of the evaluations were to satisfy external funders; less than one-tenth of the organizations studied designed their evaluations to assess their own strategies and quality. If we translate this occurrence in the non-profit world into the public sector, we can assume that government agencies are also more concerned with measuring program impacts to satisfy accountability requirements than improving upon and learning from their own processes. Organizations exist to carry out a certain purpose and agreed-upon mission, and to do so in ways that reflect their values. Although being accountable to funders is a worthy goal, organizations must also hold themselves accountable to their own goals and mission.

An empowering, collaborative evaluation process leads to meaningful and useful results. When knowledge organization workers participate in evaluating their work, it enhances their learning, confidence, and sense of ownership of results as they work together to make sense of their experiences. Establishing a logical decision making process, as well as drawing upon experience and knowledge, can reinforce organizational memory. Creating a workplace culture of reflective practice and inquiry, where workers incorporate their experiences into discussion and record current experiences to draw upon

in the future could combat the loss of organizational memory. Ideal evaluation

approaches incorporate elements of process use and employee empowerment.

Section 3

Administrative Turnover

Research suggests that since the rise of bureaucratic organizations in the twentieth century, administrative turnover has led to inconsistent organizational outcomes (Feiock and Stream, 1998). Scholars have assumed that administrative turnover is important because it indicates a loss of organizational memory. Feiock and Stream (1998) suggest that government bureaucracies shifted in the twentieth century from employing elected civil servants to career civil servants, precisely to build consistency and expertise: a stable, knowledgeable organization with a strong memory.

Even so, state government administration is not a very stable organizational leadership setting (Haas and Wright, 1989). Though state bureaucracies have grown over the years, few studies have investigated turnover among heads of state agencies. There have been many studies of turnover in state legislative bodies, which persists at an average rate of 25 percent at each election. In Haas and Wright's (1989) analysis to discover how much turnover exists in state administrative tenure, they examined administrative turnover rates from 1959 to 1983. They found that among all types of agencies in all 50 states, 58 percent of all agency heads remained in their positions during each two-year period. The retention rate declined over time until it leveled off around 50 percent in 1973. The trend of administrators turning over more frequently is at odds with the trend of state legislators remaining in their positions for longer during the same time period. When using a four-year or six-year period instead, turnover rates were even higher. The agencies that were studied served 43 core functions of government and were in two categories: traditional state agencies like auditor and attorney general, which are

often elected; and traditional line agencies like highway patrol and education. It might be illuminating to use the methods[1] of these authors to conduct a study on more recent administrative turnover trends. It appears that no such study has been done. It would be interesting to do a similar study, but take it a step further to find and measure the impact, perhaps using a model like Carley's (1992), of administrative turnover on organizational learning and memory.

Haas and Wright's study did not try to determine any causes of turnover, but the authors speculated that it could be that governors felt increasingly confident shuffling personnel. They also found it curious that longer governor tenure did not lead to longer administrative tenure (p. 268). It is possible that state administrators might also have been dissatisfied with state pay scales or working conditions. Haas and Wright argued that more stable state bureaucracies are beneficial, because they lend policy continuity to state government.

Rainey and Wechsler (1988) found the trend of increasingly frequent turnover troubling in their quest to develop a framework of administrative turnover (they refer to it as "executive-level transition") in the public sector. Even though organizations understand that the transition period between administrations is critical and should be handled sensitively, they still found many instances of tension between outgoing and incoming administrations, hostile behavior from personnel, and other issues in the

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[1] "To explore administrative turnover rates, we collected data from the *Book of the States* supplementary publication, *Administrative Officials of the States Classified by Function*. We compared the incumbents in administrative posts heading 72 different types of agencies in every state for two-year periods starting in 1959 and continuing to 1983. Twelve two-year comparisons were executed that span the twenty-four-year period. For example, we found that from 1979 to 1981, 33 directors of state planning agencies remained in their positions for the two-year period. Since 43 states had planning agencies during that period, we calculated a retention rate of 77% (and a turnover rate of 23%) for state planning agencies for the period 1979-1981. During the same period, a total of 1,903 administrators of a possible 3, 724 retained their positions for at least two years, creating an overall biennial turnover rate of 51% for the years 1979-1981" (Haas and Wright, 1989, p. 267).

literature they reviewed. To long-time government workers, new executives are often seen as temporary, and their policy initiatives as just the flavor of the week. They often end up waiting their administration out and not accomplishing much. This cycle stymies long-term significant change and innovation, and results in the stereotype of government being inefficient and unproductive. Rainey and Wechsler acknowledged that the election cycle does affect the frequency of turnover of executives; executives often resign their positions in anticipation of an upcoming election, which is less likely to occur in the private sector. In fact, Rainey and Wechsler wanted to establish the public sector transition period as its own disciplinary subtopic in the literature on organizational development and public administration.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an explosion of interest in the topic of administrative turnover in the private sector, often referred to as "executive succession" or "CEO succession" (Kesner and Sebora, 1994). However, many studies were conducted on the effects of turnover on company performance alone, and little was said about the transition process within the organization (Orosz, 1994). One main difference that arises from the literature between public and private administrative turnover is the role the executive plays at the agency. In a private firm, the CEO often symbolizes the company itself, and holds the ultimate power for directing the company toward its goals (Brady and Helmich, 1984). In a public agency, the executive is the face of the organization, but wields much less power, and is accountable not only to the governor, but to the people of the state that elected the governor. It is unlikely that the departure of a public executive would trigger changes in stock prices, as it sometimes does with executives of private firms. Furthermore, according to a study by Vancil (1987), corporate executive tenure

averaged over 14 years, much longer than state government executives. Therefore, it is difficult to draw parallels between the impacts of private and public administrative turnover.

Carley (1992) described the relationship between turnover, performance, and organizational structure as "problematic," because the loss of organizational memory can help or hurt performance (p. 20). This aligns with Stein (1995), who said that memory can help as well as hold an organization back. Carley constructed a theoretical model to assess the impact of various factors such as organizational structure, task structure and task complexity on organizational learning and memory. She found that turnover at different levels (executive vs. analyst) might affect an organization differently depending on structure. Organizations such as restaurants or assembly lines performing simple tasks, which require less training, are more resilient in the face of turnover, which accords with Rao and Argote's (2006) findings that rigid roles and routines buffer organizations from turnover's effects. As task complexity increases, the value of the analyst increases relative to the value of the executive, since the analyst's wealth of knowledge would be lost if the analyst left the organization. In Carley's model, the executive's level of knowledge does not influence the impact of executive turnover.

Carley (1992) suggested that the complexity of an organization's task structure and the type of organizational structure (hierarchy vs. team) determine whether an organization can be resilient when confronted with turnover. Bureaucratic organizations such as state agencies are by nature quite complex. The task structure often includes quasi-repetitive integrated tasks[2] and the organizational structure in many cases contains

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[2] "A task is quasi-repetitive if the same type of problem is faced multiple times but some of the information, constraints, parameters, etc. are different each decision period, thus producing slightly different decisions.

a combination of teams and a hierarchy of decision makers. According to the model, an organization might be more resilient if it were organized more hierarchically rather than in teams because the organizational memory is contained in the upper management. In a hierarchy, each level buffers organization decisions from lower-level mistakes as the decisions are passed up the chain of command. In this case, the upper management contains most of the organizational memory, while lower-level employees are mostly replaceable.

In a team-based organization, each analyst contains most of the organizational memory. A team's memory is housed in its members, unbuffered by managerial institutional memory. So, a team is more vulnerable to memory loss when members resign, unlike a hierarchy, whose memory is upheld in management (p. 34). Carley suggested that this could be a drawback since team members would be prone to repeating mistakes when carrying out decisions. However, in the case of state government with high executive turnover, it appears beneficial for the organizational memory to be housed in the analysts instead of the executives, contrary to the model. Overall, Carley's model suggested that teams are fairly resilient in the face of executive turnover, and would be even more so when they hired experienced personnel who were appropriately trained.

The main weakness of Carley's model of personnel turnover is that it does not represent the true complexity of a large government organization; it simplifies the organizational structures and decision-making processes considerably by using a nine-member team organization. The model also hinged on the notion that there were correct decisions to be made. In a political environment like state government, there is not often

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A task is integrated if the final organizational decision is determined by combining into a single decision a plethora of previous smaller or component decisions made by various decision makers within the organization" (Carley, 1992, p. 23)

a "correct" decision. Rather, the decision that is made is the best one that can be reached by compromise. Carley's model also assumed that the organization is stable and the task remains the same over time. Under real-life conditions, this seems highly unlikely on both counts, especially over a long period of time, say, a decade containing two or three election-induced turnover events and subsequent change of political agendas. Despite these limitations, the model may prove useful in future empirical studies of administrative turnover in state government.

State government lives up to the stereotype of being unproductive and inefficient when there is high administrative turnover. It would be beneficial to have a more stable state bureaucracy system because there would be greater policy continuity. With greater policy continuity, state government workers might not be tempted to wait out the administration; they could carry out their projects to completion. If the trend of administrative turnover does not reverse, government agencies will need to become more resilient. They could do so by adopting a mostly team-based structure, and adequately training experienced personnel to perform the tasks at hand.

Analysis

Scholars have debated the specific connection between organizational learning and organizational memory for some time, but their theories generally support the idea that high organizational learning and memory accompany each other, and that turbulent social structures contribute to the deterioration of organizational learning and memory. One of Fiol and Lyles' four contextual factors for organizational learning— *environment*—refers to whether there is a stable or turbulent social environment. Knowledge encoded in the organization's social system may be lost when existing

patterns of interaction are repeatedly broken up or are not allowed to form, as is the case of organizations operating in turbulent environments. This can be costly, as it is often more cost effective to draw upon past knowledge than create it anew. Organizations with turbulent social structures may experience a loss of knowledge as relationships atrophy (Weick, 1991).

The periodic disruptive effects of the election cycle and related administrative turnover can result in knowledge loss, policy discontinuity, and can influence the behavior of the government workers who have experienced many different executives over the years. An unstable work environment disrupts workers' projects and causes anxiety among staff (Haas and Wright, 1989; Orosz, 1994). Rainey and Wechsler found instances of tension between incoming and outgoing administrations and hostile behavior from personnel in cases of high turnover. This constant disruptive cycle precludes long-term change and innovation (Rainey and Wechsler, 1988).

Feiock and Stream (1998) suggest that a turbulent environment experiencing conflict reduces government worker tenure. Their work refers mostly to municipal government, but it translates to state government since the structures are virtually the same but on a larger scale. It is possible, then, that a state government agency with weak organizational learning and memory as a result of environmental turbulence would experience more frequent administrative turnover. That could lead to a cycle of increased turnover and subsequent organizational memory loss, resulting in disempowered and disengaged workers, which could in turn lead to poor employee retention and an inability to attract and keep high-performing personnel. This raises a question about the purpose and future of state government. Perhaps government agencies exist only to carry out the

policy initiatives of the politician in office, and are not intended to be stable workplaces. But this sounds very disruptive and inefficient, and like a recipe for disgruntled and disengaged workers. If this is how we believe government should operate, it will be difficult to combat the stereotype of inefficient and unproductive bureaucracy.

When workers are trusted to take charge of their work processes and become as knowledgeable as possible, they may be less affected by administrative turnover. In a complex state government organization, performance will degrade as task complexity increases, and as task complexity increases, "the proportion of information lost at the analyst level increases and so the value of the analyst relative to executive increases" (Carley, 1992, p. 39). Therefore, the executive's store of knowledge will have a smaller influence over the organization's performance, and the executive will have less power over the regular workers (the analysts, in Carley's model).

An empowering, collaborative evaluation process leads to meaningful and useful results. In state government, agency management often does not actively encourage evaluation capacity building and reflective practice among personnel. It is a worthwhile investment: when knowledge workers are heavily involved in evaluating their work, they make sense of what they have experienced, and can bring it to bear on future projects, building organizational memory (Patton, 2008; Van Rensburg, 2011). Convincing an organization to begin performing systematic inquiry requires a shift in organizational culture, which can be difficult. Often, organizational culture will not shift without buy-in from management to give credibility to the initiative (Cousins and Earl, 1995; Keiny and Dryfus, 1993). Top leadership must strongly commit to empowering workers through employee involvement initiatives; without buy-in from management, these activities may

fail. Executives with differing philosophies of employee empowerment and involvement and varying degrees of support for workers could cause inconsistent outcomes over time. This is why team-based workers must create a habit of participatory evaluation.

The complexity of the organization's decision-making structures can influence the use of evaluation results. Using evaluation results is not a simple rational process, but requires a complex interplay of "informational, personal, political, and organizational variables" (Cousins and Earl, 1992). Continuous use of Patton's "reality testing" through evaluation and process use could also contribute to learning and memory and help groups remain resilient even during the turbulence caused by administrative turnover. It is clear that the effects of turnover are disruptive, since policy agendas can completely change between administrations, positions may be eliminated, and organizations may be restructured. One possibility to strengthen teams is better, more intentional documentation of project efforts. Stein (1995) said that it is beneficial to be able to track what was done in the past, and this notion could extend not just to the distant past, but to earlier in the team's project timeline.

Teams should ask evaluative questions throughout all phases of their projects. They should involve as many stakeholders as possible in discussions of the project, so that the end results are most usable for the greatest number of people. For example, when planning a website redesign, the core team responsible for the project should include more than just the web designer, developer, etc., but also incorporate those who will use the website frequently – either to update it or to access information from it. There may be no solution for a frequently changing policy agenda; it may be that the stereotype of

inefficient and unproductive government workers is well earned and there's nothing that will change it. However, building more resilience in workers may help.

Stakeholder, participatory, and collaborative approaches to evaluation could even be used to help teams acclimate to a new administration. Establishing routines can help build organizational memory (Rao and Argote, 2006), so incorporating routine evaluation processes into the everyday work could help a team build resilience. An agency that tends to react instead of reflect and learn could harm its performance. Weick (1991) defined learning as a changed response to the same stimulus, where knowledge arises not from a new development, but from the same pattern, reacted to in a different way. Perhaps teams that were part of a learning organization would take stock of the impacts that administrative turnover had on them and intentionally respond to them differently the next time. The organization would not merely adapt; it would improve its actions through better knowledge and understanding (Fiol and Lyles, 1985).

Above all, a shared goal and participants' desire to collaborate are the keys to success for participatory approaches (Patton, 2008). Beyond that, there are few universal best practices for conducting an evaluation in a complex environment. Instead of a prescriptive method, scholars recommend establishing a continuous exchange of information between stakeholders (Patton, 2008). In establishing this, organizations will empower their participants to learn to think and act evaluatively, which can have wide-ranging benefits. The essence of it is that the value participants derive from the process of evaluation may have more lasting impact than a summative set of findings about their work.

Conclusion

The preceding review of the literature suggests that in order to combat the disruptive effects of frequent administrative turnover, knowledge organizations like state government agencies that are organized in teams of decision makers, may use participatory evaluation techniques to evaluate their work, thereby strengthening individual and organizational learning and memory. The research discussed here suggests that evaluation approaches that promote enhanced use of results and influence behavior are most likely to lead to organizational change and learning. However, the connection between evaluation and resilience to turnover could be made more explicit with further study.

I recommend conducting a study using Haas and Wright's (1989) methodology to uncover more recent administrative turnover trends in state government. While there was a burst of interest in the topic of turnover in the 1980s and 1990s, research in the area has waned in recent years. For further study, it would be essential to have current data on turnover rates. In addition, I recommend using Carley's (1992) model to empirically measure the impact of turnover on organizational memory and learning in actual organizations. Furthermore, since the public executive transition period is a critical and sensitive time, more attention should be paid to it in the field; I agree with Rainey and Wechsler (1988) that it should be established as a disciplinary subtopic.

If further research were conducted, steps could be taken to combat the trends in organizational behavior that have been observed in state government. Instead of reacting hostilely to a new administration, workers could rest assured that disruptive effects on their work would be minimal. Instead of not encouraging capacity building and reflective

practice, administrators might view these practices as tools to get the best work out of their personnel, develop them as individuals, and strengthen their teams. However, the fact remains that state government is a highly political environment, and with every instance of turnover there may be a change of political agenda. It is my hope that by using the approaches outlined here, as many workers as possible would be insulated from disruption and state government could be an arena of productivity and innovation.

I also acknowledge that naively positivistic attempts to measure organizational memory may be futile. It is, at heart, an organization's collective consciousness. The concepts of organizational memory and learning are interconnected, non-linear, and are more than the sum of their parts. Organizations are similar to human beings—they have personalities and worldviews—because they are made of human beings, and like us, they have feelings. It is in an organization's best interest to develop resilience against disruptive events, like administrative turnover, that can hurt the collective consciousness.

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