The Forest Service Ranger: Beloved Icon or Pathway to Compliance?

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There is a forest ranger we love and might want to be. This ranger lives in the woods in a rustic wood cabin, wears a badge with a pine tree superimposed on a shield, and takes care of the land.

When visiting the Sawtooth National Forest, Pole Creek Ranger Station, I was inspired by the historic site dedicated to one such ranger, Bill Horton. Working at Pole Creek from 1908 to 1929 during the summer, Horton shod and packed horses, installed range and telephone lines, patrolled boundaries, checked grazing allotments, patrolled for and put out small fires, and even worked on the alignment for what is now State Highway 75 through the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

I, like many others, fell for the little guard stations in the woods (most now mothballed), the badge, green uniforms, and tales of land stewardship. From college on, I spent most of my spare time outdoors and longed for a related career. After newspaper reporting on forestry in Oregon, I pursued a master's degree in public administration/environmental politics to improve my chances of finding a natural-resources job. Retired Regional Forester Craig Rupp, who taught my forest policy class at Colorado State University, regaled us with stories about the first Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, the early Forest Service, and battles to conserve overused forests and rangelands. Many who joined the agency were inspired by early Pinchot stories. I certainly was.

I wanted in.

I did my master's research on Forest Service public involvement, volunteered at a regional office, and was hired as a temporary employee—a typical Forest Service story, although most employees start at a district office. I found a very complex agency in the mid-1980s: a four-level "line/staff" organization of ranger districts, forests, and regional and national offices; 29,000 employees; and many directorates including administration and research. My subsequent Forest Service career in public affairs, urban outreach, and policy took me across the country. I worked in all levels and divisions, including several years in the District of Columbia (DC). As a result of this experience, I saw firsthand the Forest Service's organization

structure and its resulting culture as it responded to outside societal and legislative pressures.

In this essay, I look at how the Forest Service culture (*Merriam-Webster* defines cultures as "the set of shared values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institute or organization") may be creating a leadership that is resistant to change and problematic in a time of complexity and competing missions.

Rangers of Yesteryear and Today

Those of us who have worked for the Forest Service would agree that Pinchot is responsible for shaping the agency as we know it today. After helping President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt designate thousands of acres of public lands as forest reserves (today's national forests) and finagling their transfer from the General Lands Office in the Department of Interior to his own Forestry Bureau in the Department of Agriculture, Pinchot needed to administer, conserve, and restore these far-flung western lands. To do this he created a loyal cadre of front line supervisors—rangers.

Using rangers to manage the western lands was not a new concept. The General Land Office had rangers, but these men were political appointees accused of corruption. Pinchot wanted to replace the General Land Office rangers with Forestry Bureau rangers. His ranger had to be "sound and able bodied, capable of enduring hardship…able to take care of himself and his horses…build trails and cabins, ride, pack and deal tactfully with all classes of people. Must know something about land surveying, estimating and scaling timber, logging, land laws, mining and the livestock business" (Pinchot 1998).

The early rangers also had to be tough. "They were given glad hand by few and cold shoulder by many" (Spencer 1956). Timber cutters, railroaders, miners, homesteaders, and ranchers saw the West as theirs and fought outside interference. Pinchot hired through the civil service and a qualifying exam, and by 1910 opposition against the Forest Service had subsided. A second generation of rangers with both college degrees and practical skills led small district staffs, each consisting of perhaps a clerk and a few seasonal fire guards. Often the clerk was the ranger's spouse; this practical dual career arrangement persisted into the 1980s when it was discontinued because of anti-nepotism policies. Rangers and staff worked at forest supervisors' offices in the winter and at dispersed guard stations for summer fieldwork.

In explaining Pinchot's achievement, historian Char Miller (2013) reminds us that Pinchot and his allies, at the turn of the 20th century, had to convince the public that western lands had been overcut and overgrazed

and that the new Forest Service was vital for replanting, regenerating, and repairing those lands.

Before he assumed leadership over the forest reserves, Pinchot gave serious thought to how he could build and nurture an agency-wide esprit de corps. This was important because the fledgling Forest Service would have to hire many new employees to manage millions of acres of forests. These forest guards would protect and regulate far-flung landscapes often with little direct contact with supervisors.

According to Miller (2013), Pinchot believed employees would need a set of symbols to remind them and the public "… [of] their connection to the agency's mission, goals, and objectives." One of these symbols is the iconic pine tree superimposed on the agency shield; and others included the famous collie, Lassie, who helped Ranger Corey Stuart with conservation causes in *Lassie*, the popular television show, in the 1960s; and Smokey Bear, the stern guardian of the forest and property of the National Advertising Council. These symbols are in a large part why the inspiring image of the Forest Service was retained into the 1960s. When a recent Secretary of Agriculture tried to rebrand the Forest Service and change beloved symbols, both present employees and retirees went ballistic.

Pinchot initiated other methods to ensure rangers represented the agency aims. He structured the Forest Service as a *line organization*, so called because its hierarchy of rangers, forest supervisors, and regional foresters have a line of authority to the Chief and executive department. (All the other specialties are called *staff* and upper levels may have supervisors [directors], but they are outside the agency chain of command.)

During my time with the Forest Service, despite many changes, mandates, controversies, and a more diverse workforce, I observed one fascinating constant. Those within the line organization leadership structure, line officers from rangers on up, were quite different than staff.

- Most employees who aspired to line jobs followed a predictable rite of passage: (1) pursue visibility as a staff employee through details or teams, (2) find a sponsor, and (3) focus on upward mobility. The most common path was a detail as a deputy district ranger position for "tryout"; district ranger; a Legislative Affairs or other DC office staff position; deputy forest supervisor (another tryout job); and forest supervisor. A very few attained the next steps: deputy regional forester and regional forester.
- Staff jobs were stepping stones for upwardly mobile aspirants, and key positions were often filled by generalists not from that discipline. Staff specialists who had the professional credentials and

interest often felt marginalized as the organization focused on moving line-bound employees up and out.

- Line officers were the focus. Little could be done without their approval—backed by the sweeping authority given to supervisors by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Forest Service tradition of line authority modeled after that in the military. To their superiors, line officers were "the field" and often called to lead teams or special projects, as well as participate in daily "morning standups" and frequent management team meetings, artifacts of an era before electronic communications. This meant line officers were often out of the office and staff had to work around their availability, which often disrupted work processes that required line officer approval.
- When colleagues transitioned from staff into line jobs, I observed they often shifted from critical thinking and challenging agency practices to accepting and defending agency practices. Obedience also seemed to transcend partisan politics. A line officer I knew seemed to be an environmentalist when leading a national initiative under a Democratic administration. Once back on his home unit under a new Republican administration, he was summoned to DC for a meeting and upon his return, pushed to increase timber and salvage harvest on a forest plan amendment.
- Most line officers seemed more upbeat than other employees. Many moved every 3–4 years and had a continuing experience of new adventure, success, and good career endings. They often told tales of "sacrificing" personal ties for the agency.

Toward the end of my career, I experienced the line officer–staff difference first hand as a district ranger in the West. (Yes, I was recruited by sponsors in upper management and had tryouts as deputy ranger and acting ranger.)

- Although I found the ranger position generated great respect from my employees and community, I was overwhelmed and distracted from my job of overseeing the district by demands for compliance from all levels of the organization. These demands included requirements for security training, meeting attendance, and field employee support for administrative processes or even pet initiatives from regional or DC staff directors. (The old system of controlled correspondence would have moderated this, but with Intranet everyone had access to the district ranger.)

- Besides higher pay, line officers had more privileges than other employees. As a ranger, I had special access to support services and special contacts in administration.
- At ranger gatherings, I was surprised how elated many of my peers were just to be a ranger. For many, this was a career-long dream.
- I was also surprised how much I was in demand for advice, influence, and decision processes—not just by my own staff, but often by forest staff officers, other personnel, and even my superiors on the forest. I was asked to intervene in many difficulties often beyond my sphere of authority.

Rangers Today: Yesterday's Success Might be Today's Problem

Although the *line organization* served the Forest Service well in the 20th century, based in part on leadership behavior appropriate for a straightforward mission and clear conservation mandate in 1905, numerous surveys have found that this leadership structure could be contributing to the agency's decline and ineffectiveness as it confronts 21st-century issues.

Hull (2011) noted the Forest Service's decline from a respected, effective agency to a case study of bureaucratic red tape and low morale. Leaders received poor marks in employee surveys; employees also reported a stressful and demoralizing work environment (Brown et al. 2010). In 2011, the Partnership for Public Service, a "nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that strives for a more effective government for the American people" ranked the Forest Service 198th out of 229 agencies. The agency had become a favorite target of the Government Accountability Office (GAO), criticized for endless reorganizations, ill-planned and ineffective new technologies (Nazzaro 2009), and poor budget stewardship (GAO 2011).

Other criticisms leveled against the Forest Service include one fervent critic claiming that although Pinchot designed the Forest Service based on *scientific management*, a 1900s notion that natural resources and people could be designed and managed by engineering principles, today's Forest Service lacks a coherent vision and pursues fads such as ecosystem management (Nelson 2000). Others alleged that the Forest Service is too focused on business and processes like safety and diversity (Courtright 2016). In this view, much time and energy are expended on activity unrelated to the land stewardship mission and the Forest Service needs to refocus on its land conservation mission rather than business operation tactics.

Carroll (2017) asserted that new demands for privatization and/or state management of national forests may be fueled by poor Forest Service leadership, but he argued that national forests could be restored to the public through visionary leadership that reconnects people to land.

Other critics have been more specific in their criticism. Long-time critic Randall O'Toole (2016) claimed a legacy of poor management continues today because below-cost timber cutting has been replaced by unaccountable spending for fire management ($7 billion in 2015, he claimed) as the new cash cow. An even more cynical "rant" from a disgruntled mining official (Gardner 2008) said the Forest Service can't or won't change because of practices such as interchangeable managers (transferred between widely different units ranging from Southern cypress swamp to vast northwest conifer forests); employees too focused on their own pay, retirement, and personal security to challenge the status quo; and a quasi-military structure.

The *Places We Like to Work* survey of employees (Partnership for Public Service 2017) showed that effective leadership measures of "empowerment," "supervisors," and "fairness" in the Forest Service crept up three percent from 2010 to 2017, although "senior leadership" declined from 37.7 to 36.1. The agency was ranked 225 out of 305 federal agencies. This marginal improvement is nothing to boast about and is far from the plaudits the agency received as an efficient organization during the 1960s (Kaufman, 1960).

Employee surveys in the 1990s indicated marked differences in values between line officers and other employees at the time (Kennedy 1993). A later study (Kennedy et al. 2005) indicated line officers still thought the agency rewarded loyalty over innovation—values seemingly at odds with leadership criteria developed for the federal sector such as Leading Change and Leading People (OPM 2017).

Why a Line Organization Structure No Longer Works

So why has the *line organization* leadership structure contributed to an ineffective Forest Service, when it served the agency well in the past? Herbert Kaufman's study, *The Forest Ranger: a Study in Administrative Behavior*, provides a good starting point to answer that question. His expertise was public administration, which studies how public policy is implemented. In other words, how organizations are designed to carry out policy and how these designs are solidified by reinforcing certain ideas and behaviors. During the 20th century, public administration was both apologist and critic for the modern bureaucracy, which was initially considered a huge advance over previous power systems of patronage, charismatic power, and family connections. By mid-century, the mechanisms, results, and potential problems of the bureaucracy were well described and shown to be perhaps not as ideal as designers had hoped.

The Forest Ranger is still used in public administration classes today and is touted by many Forest Service leaders. Kaufman's book was based on

observations and interviews with five district rangers, and subsequent review of Forest Service policies and procedures. He found the agency developed in rangers the "will and capacity to conform," also known as *voluntary compliance,* through selection, frequent transfers, upward reporting, internal reviews, training, and use of language and symbols (Kaufman 1960) (Kaufman 2006, p. 165, 198). This resulted in the Forest Service being an effective organization that balanced national goals with decentralization and local autonomy. However, Kaufman warned some years later that leaders who voluntarily complied might be locked into a prescribed set of ideas and behaviors formed in a particular context and could have trouble changing if a new context required it (Kaufman 2006, p. 261–269).

Based on my own observations as an employee and brief experience as a ranger, there was the expectation that we would voluntarily comply with anything dished out by the organization, whether it related to the field mission or not.

In 2011, after transitioning from a Forest Service career, I wanted to do a PhD dissertation to update the Kaufman study and see how voluntary compliance worked in the line officer cadre beyond the district ranger and in the more complex circumstances that followed the environmental decades of the 1960s and 1970s.

I reviewed the literature up to 2011 and found that most work was general commentary or focused on environmental assessment teams. District ranger views that aligned more with commodity interests than public interests were found to be influenced by institutional socialization processes that had not changed since the 1950s (Twight and Lyden 1988). Samson and Knopf (2001) called the Forest Service an archaic bureaucracy that addressed complex problems with more teams and budget requests. Despite policy emphasis on collaboration and flexibility, Davenport et al. (2007) found the emphasis on upward accountability and centralized power structures constrained community relationships. Although 12 district rangers interviewed on National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decisions varied in backgrounds, management styles, and local contexts (MacGregor and Seesholtz 2008), all tended to minimize risk in selecting projects. Line officer risk aversion created more processes, delays, and costs without improving court defensibility (Mortimer et al. 2011).

Surveys also found that staff specialists and line officers had different aims in NEPA analyses. Line officers were focused more on organization goals and getting projects done efficiently than on good processes and stakeholder relationships, perhaps because they felt pressured to meet targets for field resource accomplishments (Stern and Predmore 2011, Stern et al. 2010).

Brown et al. (2010) evaluated employee survey results to assess impacts on Forest Service organizational values following an increased proportion of female employees. The survey indicated some differences in the resource management attitudes and preferences of agency men and women, but many were relatively small and were generally not found for line officers. They concluded that the institutional norms and culture described by Kaufman still exert a homogenizing influence on employees with long tenure or aspiration to line positions. The diverse values women and new hires bring are difficult to sustain in the face of powerful organizational pressure to conform. An employee is quoted as saying that top leaders are in a system where everyone thinks alike.

Three recent PhD dissertations were based on case studies of district rangers and tried to build on Kaufman's classic study. Leonard (1978) concluded that managerial assumptions, formal structure, personality, and task environment helped determine manager behavior, which in turn shapes the organization's social environment. Brewer (1984) found a role shift among California rangers and supervisors from remotely situated resource specialist to broadened role of public lands manager but did not evaluate organization influence.

Gaffrey (2007) showed that despite sweeping changes to line officer makeup, role, and controls, compliance behavior was alive and well. He observed a Forest Service with much less oversight and more diversity: internal reviews were infrequent, transfers more voluntary, and there was no longer homogeneity in ranger gender or professional background. Modern rangers followed a yearly work plan rather than keeping a daily diary on their activities. Instead of written memos sent only through the chain of command, communication now came electronically from many sources. Nevertheless, rangers still practiced voluntary compliance, reinforced by subtle organization practices. As Gaffrey noted, rangers whose administrative behavior was not in line with their supervisor's desire or direction were redirected through voluntary compliance measures, such as reviews of staff–community relations or a directed reassignment to a new position. These new positions offered better promotions so moving could be either a reward or punishment. Rangers carefully watched moves as signals of preference from leadership.

Voluntary compliance in the Forest Service, as described by Kaufman, appears to have continued despite major changes in roles, demographics, professional background, and oversight since the 1950s when *The Forest Ranger* case studies were compiled (Kaufman 1960). Recent literature on the Forest Service indicates different values between line officers and other employees and a shift toward compliant values when employees move into

line positions. How come voluntary compliance remains so entrenched?

Voluntary Compliance as Management Behavior: Public Administration Ideas on Its Origin and Operations

Social sciences such as public administration study the ordering of social relationships as mental and behavioral constructs that evolve and are reinforced over time. In an organization they become ways of thinking and acting, just as hardened and impenetrable as the walls of a building. You can't see them, but you know they are there. And they hold the organization together. In public administration, organization design is presented much as an architect might present blueprints for a new building.

Four ideas on bureaucracies from public administration theory indicate how voluntary compliance for line officers could have been designed into the framework and operations of the Forest Service and reinforced for more than 100 years (see Figure 1). The first, from classic public administration theory, was a norm in the 1950s when Kaufman studied the Forest Service. The second, from decision-making theory, is Kaufman's theoretical framework for studying how the Forest Service influenced ranger values and behavior. The third and fourth ideas, from institutional and power-domination theory, further explain how this influence could continue unconsciously as a socially reinforced behavior.

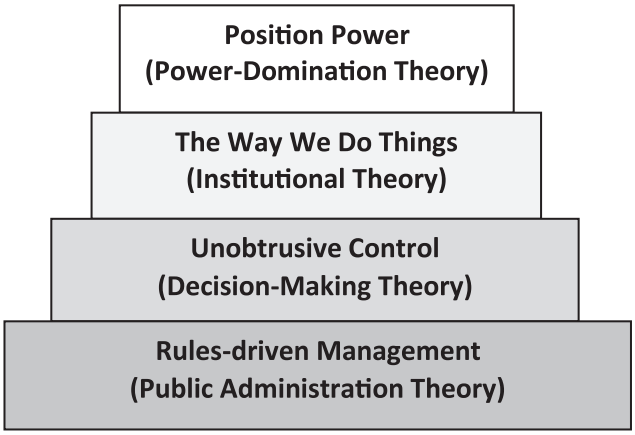

Figure 1. Depicted are four public administration theories as a building to indicate that human behavior within an organization can be as permanent and solid as something constructed from stone and steel. Foundation (bottom box) is ideal bureaucracy of *rules-driven management*, where voluntary compliance may have been designed into the Forest Service. I suggest this was strengthened through organization practices (*unobtrusive control*) and management norms (*the way we do things*) and finally has been so reinforced by manager position power (*domination*) that it persists despite organization and environmental changes.

Rules-Driven Management (Classic Public Administration Theory)

Rules-driven management emerged from classic studies of public administration. Max Weber (1947) studied the ideal organization developed by the United States and Europe at the turn of the 20th century. Weber named it *bureaucracy*, which in his time lacked negative connotations but simply indicated that an organization created to administer complex tasks of society would add more bureaus to do more tasks. Confident in science and engineering, early social architects saw this as a positive thing: a bland organization to dutifully carry out tasks through division of labor, hierarchy of authority, written rules, and merit (appointment based on qualifications).

Since its creation in 1905, the Forest Service has remained a classic bureaucracy. Its original design has remained intact, with new divisions or "bureaus" (or lately, service centers or project teams) simply added as new tasks are assigned. This design was based on early 20th-century ideas of scientific management—that jobs, management, and organization design could be based on scientific studies on how to most efficiently do a given task (Taylor 1911). Administrative processes were objective, universal, natural, altogether devoid of historical and cultural contexts, and dictated only by scientific laws (Lee 1995). Chief Forester Pinchot designed the Forest Service as an instrument within the overall project of scientific management in American society (Nelson 1999).

Rules-driven management is how a bureaucracy implements laws (Weber 1947). The bureaucracy has legal-rational authority (from the US Congress through law) to impose its will on others (domination). Law gives an organization a certain task to do and imbues it with authority to do it. Legitimacy rests on rules, and submission to authority is based on duty of office. Obedience is to an impersonal order, not an individual. An official with legal-rational authority has power derived from established rules. Even in the new millennium, members of Congress seem to believe this premise. Scandals among federal agencies are met with an oversight hearing where the "responsible" top executive is identified, grilled, and often forced to resign because the organization did not carry out congressional intent as stated in law.

Forest Service line officer compliance is based on rules-driven management. The line of authority from the executive branch confers faith in the administrator's legal-rational impartiality. Accepting a line position may restrict the recipient's decision premises to acceptance of organization action and manager direction as impartial and correct, explaining my colleagues' tendency to defend the organization when they became part of its leadership culture.

Unobtrusive Control (Decision-Making Theory)

How does a bureaucracy foster leadership compliance? Kaufman's innocuous *Forest Ranger* study was grounded in a public administration perspective that organizations subtly controlled behavior of their leaders. He saw voluntary compliance developed through *unobtrusive control* measures employed by Forest Service leadership. This was based on a school of thought that criticized Weber's idealistic bureaucracy as too simplistic and challenged the view that managers would impartially implement laws. Simon (1957) and March and Simon (1958) proposed that managers were subject to bounded rationality—limited by available information, their mental cognitive ability, and limited time to make decisions. Perrow (1986) said organizations helped create the bounded rationality they wished for managers to have through such unobtrusive control, which is how power quietly worked out in modern bureaucracies. Premises for managers' decisions were controlled through division of labor, systems of hierarchical authority, communication channels, training, and indoctrination. These methods limited information so that managers made decisions viewed as correct by the organization and helped them adapt their decisions to organizational motives. Perrow said a supervisor structured the environment so employees saw the proper things in the proper light. Not giving orders per se, the supervisor set priorities by statements such as "we had better take care of this first."

Perrow advanced the social science perspective that organization structure was made up of stable behavior patterns that changed very slowly. The organization communicated in ways that screened out parts of reality and magnified others, relying on managers' bounded rationality to base decisions on precedent or a very limited search for alternatives. Organization symbols became the real world; anything that did not fit was not communicated. Members only saw things as described in an organization's vocabulary. Unobtrusive control may have evolved to reduce conflicts. By limiting information and limiting manager premises, the organization could shape behavior without open coercion (Perrow 1986).

Kaufman's observations illustrated these ideas. Rangers made appropriate decisions based on organization premise-limiting factors of frequent moves, professional affiliation, and top-down information channels.

But according to Gaffrey's (2007) examples, modern rangers still complied, even without the earlier mechanisms of unobtrusive control. Why?

The Way We Do Things (Institutional Theory)

Institutional theory applies to modern entities that include organizations, professional societies, customs, and practices. It explores how values persist

regardless of outside change. Institutions instill values, create reality, and reinforce structure through belief systems that exist as distinct normative (standard of what is normal or right) systems. Forestry, for example, is an institution with values, norms, and a view of reality that persists over time.

Unlike a business, a public organization cannot show value through making a profit so it is driven to justify its existence through showing that it is right (Scott 2008). To justify its legal-rational (law-based) authority, a government bureaucracy creates symbols and roles that relate *the way we do things* to the right way. Pinchot validated the Forest Service by symbols such as the badge that conferred both authority (badge) and care (the tree), reinforcing the Forest Service as the right, legally authorized entity to care for forests. Most of these symbols are still part of the modern Forest Service.

Organizations cling to their legitimacy by conforming to the regulations that are based on laws. Public organizations are given a task and authority, and make rules for doing the task; these morph into social realities. Leaders are socialized to accept these rules as the legitimate way to do things. Leader actions create social structures and these structures in turn create leaders by determining their values and behaviors (Scott 2008).

In the Forest Service, leadership norms, such as upward-looking compliance, inner-circle selection of other compliant employees for advancement, and use of staff positions for stepping stones have become institutionalized as the way we operate and thus, the right way. Most Forest Service chiefs served in the correct progression of line positions: ranger, forest supervisor, regional forester, and a post in Washington, DC. Is this the wrong way to develop leadership? Not necessarily. But is it the only way? Experience with specific positions in an organization may be important, but I am not convinced it should be the only qualification for effectiveness in a complex position impacted by many external forces and powers. Education and experience in other disciplines besides natural resources might contribute much, particularly in the complex decision environment in DC. My education and early career work in journalism, followed by study of political science prior to entering the agency helped me understand lots of "whys." (I did observe some foresters who believed Pinchot's maxim that "a forester can do anything," competing with me in public affairs. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) seemed to agree; for many years individuals had to be in Forester series 0460 to qualify for line positions; and this series still qualifies for most Forest Service jobs).

Two recent Forest Service chiefs who came from a non-line officer background—one from Forest Service research and one with high-level Bureau of Land Management experience—critiqued the status quo and put nontraditional people in top positions, creating consternation in the

leadership ranks. But they seemed to have little long-term impact on the Forest Service. The chiefs who followed had more conventional backgrounds and more traditional styles—although one replaced the symbolic green vehicle fleet dating back to at least the 1930s with lower-cost white.

Position Power (Power-Domination Theory)

If voluntary compliance was built into early rangers and subsequent line officers as part of the Forest Service initial design as a rules-driven bureaucracy, instilled in line officers through unobtrusive control mechanisms into the 1960s, and reinforced after that by normative practices on the way we do things, what force is reinforcing these norms today? Why did change initiatives emphasizing new management practices, nontraditional leaders in many positions, and increased diversity of specialty, ethnicity, gender, and thought seem to have little impact on how Forest Service leaders operated? I would suggest the traditional culture of voluntary compliance continues to operate unconsciously because its members have *position power.*

Position power, from power-domination theorists, builds on earlier notions of legal authority and manager-bounded rationality to show how leadership cultures can reinforce old structures in the face of change. This was illustrated in a case study of a United Kingdom police force publicly exposed for corruption. Despite reforms, local officers continued old practices, supported by subordinates (Gordon et al. 2008). Leaders' legitimate authority becomes a social reality that channels power in organizations. Practices embedded in an organization's social reality legitimize certain actions and unobtrusively delegitimize others. Using unobtrusive control, leaders with position power subtly continue old hierarchical power relations and formal bureaucratic practices, despite changes aimed at new behavior. Only viewpoints and actions that resonate with the prevailing social order are considered legitimate. Those with position power rationalize what is called legitimate, and subordinates accept their version as rational.

Using position power, Forest Service line officers may unobtrusively articulate and reinforce hierarchical power relations and formal bureaucratic practices even in the absence of formal directives or a homogeneous work force. Today's line officer may be urban, female, from any ethnic group, and not even from a forestry profession—yet socialized to operate much as her rural, white male forester predecessors (Brown et al 2010). Pressure for compliance may be passed on by selecting and promoting those who comply, as indicated in Gaffrey's (2007) examples. Compliance with organization norms seems to now be an end in itself for line officers. Conflict may arise when staff specialists and other employees act from institutional values of their profession rather than from voluntary compliance.

This position power model could further illuminate the conflict between staff and decision-maker goals found in recent NEPA studies (Stern and Predmore 2011) as well as employees' critique of leadership in the Partnership for Public Service surveys. It might help explain burdensome business procedures handed down by managers who treat each new law (intended to enforce new society priorities such as civil rights or homeland security) as not only a new rule but a new priority. Overemphasis on line officers' careers, adherence to rules for their own sake, and the resulting impact on staff effectiveness might be contributing to other Forest Service-acknowledged problems that include ineffective and process-heavy NEPA analyses (Bosworth 2001).

Discussion

The Forest Service's original structure as a bureaucracy (Weber 1947) is the foundation for line officer domination. Legal authority supports rules-driven management and presumed infallibility of line officers. Unobtrusive control mechanisms still favor choice of line officers from employees who do what the agency wants, and transfers offered as rewards or punishments reinforce upwardly mobile managers who take their cues from those above them in the chain. Communication systems that screen out some parts of reality and magnify others may perpetuate contradictory views of line officers as both central to unit operations and the best source material for short-term upper level assignments—creating organization chaos as staff must plan projects around unavailable managers. Using the organization and its authorities to promote, shape, and reinforce compliant leaders has become institutionalized as the way we do things and the right way to do things in the Forest Service. Because these methods are practiced by line officers who hold position power and define how things are done, and are also reinforced by up-and-comers who aspire to line positions, challenges or alternate approaches are unlikely.

Voluntary compliance could be why the Forest Service has been called rigid (Twight and Lyden 1988) or an archaic rules-driven bureaucracy (Samson and Knopf 2001) despite many changes. It helps explain the disconnect between employees and managers as well as the conflict line officers have indicated between their own values and that of the organization (Kennedy et al. 2005). It could help explain low employee ratings for senior leaders and GAO critiques mentioned earlier, why reform chiefs had little influence, why "Reinvention," which was aimed to reduce overhead offices and refocus on field units, mostly faded away, and why centralized business processes have caused so much disruption (treated by compliant managers as new rules to be obeyed). Perhaps voluntary compliance with informal or formal orders

is still expected and such orders are obeyed. Any organization requests are legitimate and the right thing, backed up by the authority and meaning of the Forest Service itself. Compliance is reinforced by selecting and promoting for position power those who comply. Adherence to the original bureaucratic design is reinforced by a leadership designed to be impartial and unquestioning of any directives that come along.

But maybe compliance is a good thing. Government regulations often aim at it. What does recent literature say? Young (2011) offered new strategies for federal managers to engage the less conformist, more independent thinking new generation to create "a compliance culture" but did not articulate why it is needed. However, in a large OPM survey of federal employees, Yang and Kassekert (2010) found federal employees respond better to innovative culture rather than top-down control and that the traditional bureaucracy view of federal employees wanting direction and security was false. Employees wanted to use their imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in solving organization problems; further, employee capacity for problem solving was severely underused. Citing recent leadership literature, Green and Roberts (2012) indicated traditional federal top-down leadership may be on a collision course with new employees who value autonomy and personal integrity. Leader-centric models based on views of industrial society and leadership models of large bureaucratic organizations could be invalid in a postmodern age where organizations are complex, networked, emotional, and chaotic. Bureaucratic emphasis on position and power strategies based on coercion or reward are irrelevant to the values and motives of the postmodern workforce.

Wilson (1989) said a bureaucracy must manage behaviors so it can address its critical task, but its very bureaucratic design for stability and routine will resist the true innovation needed when the critical task needs to be redefined. In 1960, the Forest Service had a clear self-defined critical task of timber and range management, but today the agency lacks such singularity. Many laws and interests offer multiple and often competing tasks. To redefine the critical task (mission) is a leadership function. Forest Service change efforts have sought transition to more complex models of ecosystem management, climate change mitigation, and community engagement (among others) but have relied on its original organization design and voluntarily compliant leadership culture.

Productive change only occurs when leaders correctly analyze the organization's existing culture against attributes needed to achieve strategic objectives (Schein 2010). What if leadership is the force that resists change? Compliance for the sake of compliance could be an archaic function of outdated bureaucracies that prevents the innovation and engagement needed for complex times.

Ironically enough, Pinchot may have created a leadership structure and culture that encouraged voluntary compliance, but he apparently did not practice it. He was fired by President Taft in 1910 for insubordination, after opposing practices by the Secretary of the Interior that he thought were unethical. Pinchot reported his last remarks to his staff in Washington, in the District of Columbia (DC): "Never forget that the fight in which you are engaged for the safe and decent handling of our timberlands is infinitely larger than any man's personal presence or personal fortunes. We have had here together the kind of association that I do not believe any set of men in the Government service ever had before" (Pinchot 1998).

What happened to the ranger, this independent, gutsy symbol of conservation? I know a few rangers in the 1980s who resigned rather than give in to local or upper-level pressure, and quite a few more who were transferred or even promoted when they got in trouble. However, most line officers I knew were masters at risk avoidance. Although Pinchot was a master politician, he did not seem to avoid conflict or risk.

Conclusions

Despite major changes in the Forest Service's environment and makeup, mechanisms in its design continue to select and reinforce for voluntarily compliant, upwardly focused line officers. This assembly line produces the same product regardless of material or entry point.

I have offered some ideas from the field of public administration to describe and explain resilient *voluntary compliance* behavior of Forest Service line officers and ramifications for the organization. Anecdotal and survey evidence indicates that in this static, *rules-driven bureaucracy, unobtrusive control* measures of the past have been institutionalized for district ranger and other jobs up the chain of command, reinforced by *the way we to do things* promotion methods and *position power* of line officers.

The district ranger who patrolled the boundaries and lived summers in a little guard station has moved to the city in a politically charged administrative job within a complex work environment. A ranger is bombarded with many competing views on the mission and offered very limited scientific guidance on what should be done—unlike the rough-and-ready forester of 1905 who brought European forestry ideas and confidence to the unruly western landscapes.

From my own experience, a ranger is distracted by social forces in the organization that produce behaviors that ignore today's or tomorrow's complex land stewardship challenges. The first year of my ranger stint, I created two lists: one of mission-critical work that I, my staff, and/or the community wanted to see accomplished, and the second of organization directives that

rarely related to work on the ground. By my second year, I basically gave up the first list as it was not getting done and only offered stress.

Only the leadership behavior of district rangers has been studied, and the behaviors and relationships of positions higher up the chain of command only inferred. I proposed evaluating compliance behavior in all line positions but found little interest. I was counseled to study successful leaders and compare them to others (already overdone). I know noteworthy folks who overcame the system and know many other dedicated field people today. But I am more interested in what social mechanisms subvert effectiveness. The Forest Service is a good place to consider this problem, because its original leadership design has been well described. Leaders socialized to comply may not always respond creatively to new challenges to refine their mission with new knowledge and social change—they may tend to just do what they are told, wait for orders, or make risk-aversive decisions. They may add new divisions, staffs, processes, and teams in reaction to laws, lawsuits, and other pressures—increasing complexity and fragmentation, and employee and public frustration.

What should be done? Let's change the focus of the debate. Since the 1970s, Forest Service critics have blamed laws, interest groups, and the US Congress, and suggested training, privatization, decentralization, economic incentives, or other new designs to fix the Forest Service. I suggest we look at the social mechanisms that may be perpetuating a Forest Service that worked fine in 1910 but is outdated and unconsciously reinforced by the modern progeny of the forest ranger and stifling innovation and local collaboration.

Let's look again at the Forest Service line officers: rangers, forest supervisors, regional foresters, and their deputies; plus, the dozens of aspirants now on detail who are being tried out for line potential. What are their motives? How did they get this far? What are their goals? What pressures do they experience once they become line officers? Let's do some confidential interviews with non-line employees to articulate what behaviors they see rewarded and punished. Redo the Kennedy employee and line surveys (Kennedy 1993, Kennedy et al. 2005) to evaluate the values of line officers and those of staff, and determine what line officers think the Forest Service wants. Do the survey answers agree with OPM standards for federal executives of Leading Change and Leading People? Why not? We could also look at OPM qualifications for new hires entering the system and perhaps intending to move up. A college degree in forestry in 1905 meant the best education of the time, but is it enough for the 21st century when the chief of the Forest Service must deal with complex policy, political and legal environments, other federal and nongovernmental organizations, staff members with advanced degrees, and a U.S. Congress full of attorneys?

This essay is not intended to denigrate Forest Service line officers. For most people in the Forest Service the agency motto, "caring for the land and serving people," resonates. But employees who enter the line are subjected to social mechanisms that few have considered or understood. I have highlighted some such mechanisms described in the science of public administration.

Instead of weaving between partisan solutions of throwing more money at government organizations or trying to get rid of them, let's look at how they are functioning. Leadership carries the design, values, and power that determine organization function—whether appropriate or outdated. Understanding this dynamic in the Forest Service could lead to similar insights about other organizations and possibly aid true reinvention of the federal sector. Instead of rhetoric about transformative leaders or antigovernment diatribes, the focus could be redesigning organizations and leadership to function well for the 21st century.

Solutions?

I speculated that many federal government problems could be the result of compliant leadership. Since Kaufman so nicely laid out how voluntary compliance works in Forest Service district rangers, it seemed important to conduct evaluative research to see if this hypothesis applies to the whole Forest Service leadership culture. The foundation for this chapter—my hypothesis of voluntary compliance and brief literature review—was a *Discussion* paper I published in *Journal of Forestry.* Since I was not able to fund this important research, which has never been done, I wrote this article in hopes of inspiring a future Ph.D. candidate to do it (Chojnacky 2012).

I hesitate to offer specific potential solutions to the problem of voluntary compliance because in my experience with the Forest Service, many "solutions" tried without prior research have failed to achieve their aims. One of these efforts was a "Reinvention"; however, this was squashed by the U.S. Congress. (Various laws passed by Congress—often contradictory mandates—and conflicting partisan Congressional oversight agendas have increased the difficulty and complexity of federal government, another important and related topic that I can't do justice to in this brief essay.) Spin-off initiatives such as "Enterprise" (where employees operated as small businesses) continued but lost steam in transition from Democratic to Republican presidential administrations, and failed to streamline agency business practices as initially hoped.

In the new millennium, Forest Service leadership tried to ward off proposed reductions in national and regional office numbers by creating the Albuquerque Service Center (ASC) to centralize business processes.

When I was a ranger in 2007–2009, ASC seemed to be source of many new problems. This top-down, budgeted "off the top" entity merely added specialized employees and new processes without addressing overall inefficiencies of multiple administrative systems created over many years. I doubt that any cost savings were documented, but perhaps things improved after I left the Forest Service

Since this book is aimed at solutions, I will offer a few prospects. Many ideas to improve Forest Service leadership were floated out in the progressive eras of management change (1980s) and Reinvention (1990s). To my knowledge none of these have been tried:

- Make the district ranger position one of long-term stewardship, more like European forest stewards, instead of a short-term stepping stone for upwardly mobile aspirants to higher paying positions in the Forest Service hierarchy.
- Make the district ranger the destination position in the Forest Service (rather than encouraging movement up "through the chairs" from district ranger to forest supervisor to regional forester, etc.), so that employees work their way through many levels and experiences, finally bringing their experience to bear on a field position that we all say is important rather than treating it as a lower rung on a career ladder.
- Implement the 360-degree review which was popular in business culture and apparently never tested in federal government. Instead of supervisors only reviewing employees, which reinforce the upward-looking focus of line officers, give equal weight to reviews by employees, peers, self, and community members. For example, a line officer I know was the reason for at least four early retirements of excellent staff people and definitely precipitated other transfers from the forest. This line officer (a well-qualified resource person with minimal leadership training and mediocre listening and people skills) has been in place more than 10 years now. What if protected anonymous reviews from those employees had been part of this person's performance review? Perhaps this officer would now be a productive resource specialist.

I conclude by offering some of my own suggestions as a public administration practitioner with experience in federal government.

- Dismantle OPM regulations that give sweeping authorities to supervisors in all federal government agencies or balance those

authorities by an outside review board of community members, peers, nongovernmental organizations, academics from relevant disciplines (management, business, natural resources, political science, public administration, communication), and union and employee representatives.

- Utilize outside management experts and public administration gurus to objectively evaluate whether current line officers within the Forest Service meet OPM's rather thoughtful Executive Core Qualifications (EQCs) that include Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions. These qualifications were initially designed for Senior Executive Service but candidates for line positions often must address them, at least on paper. (In the Forest Service, anyone at a certain grade level could apply for the Senior Executive Service by writing essay responses to how s/he met these qualifications; a headquarters group of Forest Service officials evaluated all applications but only a pool of people apparently in political favor with top brass in Washington were sent on for SES candidacy.)
- Change the pay structure so that line positions no longer command a higher salary than staff positions. Just this minor change would ensure that fewer people would seek leadership positions, and those who did pursue these positions might be people who really want to lead and care about leading rather than seeking higher grades or more opportunity.

In speaking to natural-resources specialists, perhaps I can close with an analogy. We all are aware of how to deal with a feral species—you don't need to destroy it, just keep it from reproducing. The ideas I've described offer ways to at least modify and balance the disproportionate power of the Forest Service line culture to reproduce "after its own kind."

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