Bureaucratic Encounters—
An Evaluation of Government Services

ROBERT L. KAHN
DANIEL KATZ
BARBARA GUTEK

The authors have evaluated government services in terms of bureaucratic encounters—the service-seeking transactions reported by 1,431 American adults. Reactions to such transactions are discussed as a joint product of the characteristics of the client and those of the agency. The implications of these client reactions for more general social and political questions are explored. Because so much of individual well-being depends upon service-seeking transactions, the authors propose that their quality and satisfactoriness should be regarded as social indicators, and included among the measures of the quality of contemporary life.

We have become accustomed to thinking of ourselves as a bureaucratic society, and so the epithet no longer has the bite that Presthus (1962) intended. Moreover, while the phrase originated with Presthus, the idea did not. Sociologists since Toennies have spoken of the transition from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft,* from a society that was in some sense "natural" or community-like to one more instrumental, seemingly rational, and formally organized. Many aspects of that assertion are arguable, but most social scientists would agree that along with the industrial development of nations has come an increasing emphasis on secondary rather than primary rela-

Robert L. Kahn is Director, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research; and professor of psychology, The University of Michigan. Daniel Katz is a faculty associate, Survey Research Center; and professor emeritus of psychology, The University of Michigan. Barbara Gutek is a research investigator, Survey Research Center; and lecturer in psychology, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

tionships, an increasing involvement in formal organizations rather than familial or kinship structures, and a tendency toward patterns of life activity that consist increasingly of people's roles in organizations.

ORGANIZATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Such consensus, if it exists, is based more on impressions than hard data. The various domains of life are not usually studied in commensurate terms nor over long periods of time, and it is therefore difficult to demonstrate that more of life is being lived in formal organizations and less in other kinds of associations now than at some earlier historical period. Moreover, organizational theory and organizational research have been for the most part intra-organizational in their focus and in their choice of problems. Organizational behavior, if we examine the research so labeled, has really meant the behavior of individuals in organizations rather than the behavior of organizations as such. In other words, the unit of study has been individuals rather than organizations, and in most cases the persons under study have been members of a single organization.

Problems of leadership, of relationships between supervisors and people supervised, of peer interaction, of communication, and of power, for example, have been treated as intra-organizational. In recent years students of organization have become somewhat self-conscious about such disregard of the forces and events outside the organizational boundary, but the acknowledgment of organizations as open systems continues to be more conspicuous in prefaces and introductions than in the choice of research problems.

There are exceptions to those generalizations, of course. Emery and Trist (1965) developed a very insightful schema for classifying the environments of organizations as placid-randomized, placid-clustered, disturbed-reactive, or turbulent. This four-fold typology of what they called the "causal texture" of environments was intended to predict intra-organizational consequences. It has been often quoted and reprinted but little utilized in empirical research.

The same fate has attended another and different conceptualization of organizational environments, this one by William Evan (1966). Evan proposed that the environment of any given organization be regarded as a set of other organizations, related to it much as members of a role set are related to the focal person. This concept of the "organization-set" seems to offer substantial research opportunities. It emphasizes transactions between the focal organization and the members of its set, and it treats organization and environment in the same conceptual terms. Nevertheless, we find little empirical response to Evan's proposal.

There is, of course, some empirical work on organizational responses to different environments (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1969). The general record of organizational research, however, is one of environmental neglect, and disregard of those conceptual suggestions that emphasize transactions across organizational boundaries.

A TRANSACTIONAL TYPOLOGY

At the risk of adding one more such suggestion, we wish to propose a framework for the conceptualization and conduct of research on transactions between organizations and elements in their environments. This framework, we believe, has the advantages of bringing organizational and extra-organizational behavior into the same conceptual terms, emphasizing the open-system properties of organizations, and calling attention to some neglected aspects of organizational life. After we have considered this schema, we will turn to some research that illustrates aspects of it.

Let us begin by taking as our unit of social process, both within organizations and outside them, the smallest meaningful social transaction: a discrete episode involving two persons. Let us assume that each such episode is initiated by an act of one of the two persons directed toward the other. Let us further assume that each person in such a transaction can be appropriately designated either as acting "in role" (that is, acting within the boundaries of an organization, as a member of the organization, in ways prescribed by its norms and role requirements) or as acting "not in role" (that is, not as a member of an organization). There are ambiguities, of course, but the distinction is clear enough to be useful.

The supervisor who reviews the work of a staff member is acting in his or her organizational role, and so is the staff member who suffers through the appraisal. On the other hand, the friends who later listen to each protagonist describe the episode are not acting in organizational roles. The police officer who separates two men in a street fight is acting in his or her organizational role. The passerby who attempts the same action is not—and neither are the two fighters.

Now let us present schematically the transactional categories which are generated by the two dichotomies we have described. Let $P_1 \rightarrow$ designate the person who initiates a transaction and let $P_2 \leftarrow$ designate the person to whom the transaction is directed. Either $P_1 \rightarrow$ or $P_2 \leftarrow$ may be acting as a member of an organization or as an individual outside any organizational role. Four transactional categories are thus possible, and they can be represented as follows:

FIGURE 1.
Transactional Categories in Organizational Research

$P_1 \rightarrow$

$P_2 \leftarrow$	INTRA-ORG.	EXTRA-ORG.
INTRA-ORG.	"Organizational behavior" (leadership, peer relations, etc.) 1	2 Bureaucratic encounters (service, client relations, admissions, compensation, etc.)
EXTRA-ORG.	3 Bureaucratic encounters (law enforcement, taxation, sales, outreach, etc.)	4 Family relations, friendships, neighborhood relationships, etc.

Cell 1 represents most of what is usually called organizational behavior—the interpersonal behavior of people in organizational roles. Likert's *New Patterns of Management* (1961), McGregor's *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960), Argyris' *Personality and Organization* (1957), and Fiedler's major work on *Leadership* (1971) consist primarily of findings and inferences at this level. Likert's principle of supportive relationships and McGregor's well-known contrast between Theory-X and Theory-Y styles of management are statements about the behavior of managers and employees in organizational roles.

Service-Seeking

In Cell 2 are those kinds of bureaucratic encounters in which a person outside an organization, motivated by some felt need, approaches a person inside the organization whom he or she perceives as able to meet that need. Examples come easily to mind. A student who wants to be admitted to a particular college, a patient who wants medical treatment at a clinic, a worker looking for a job or applying for unemployment benefits, a man or woman injured at work and seeking compensation, a mother who needs support for her dependent children—all illustrate that kind of transaction in which a person outside an organization initiates a conversation with a second person who is acting in his or her organizational role. The preceding examples differ in many respects but they have in common those elements that justify their classification in Cell 2 of our schema.

On one side of the desk sits the applicant for service, with all the needs, experiences, and idiosyncratic characteristics that combined to bring him or her there. On the other side of the desk sits a person whose function it is to determine the validity and appropriateness of the presenting request, the goodness of fit between it and the franchise, policies, and resources of the organization, and thus the entitlement of the applicant to service. The conversation may be brief, although the preliminaries are often lengthy. It ends with a decision, or a referral, which may satisfy or deny the presenting request. Any sympathy or antipathy that the agency representative may feel for the applicant is supposed to have no effect on the outcome of the episode. The resources of the agency and its formal policies regarding their use are expected to define the eligibility of the client for service.

One can think of the universe of such episodes in a society, through time, as the sum of all services rendered or refused, and thus the output of all client-serving organizations, private and public. For different purposes, one would be concerned with different samples or subsets of this universe of episodes. If the episodes are summed across all individuals with some particular problem, we have a basis for evaluating the adequacy of a particular category of service and the organizations that provide it. If the episodes are summed for particular individuals across organizations we have a basis for determining how well different persons and groups are being served. Indeed, the life of an individual can be looked at as consisting in significant part of the unique set of service-seeking episodes in which he or she has been the principal. That set sums the services sought and received by that individual, and says much about the quality of his or her life.

Further implications of such bureaucratic encounters emerge as we consider more specifically the sets of events that might be studied. To evaluate the functioning of an organization that is supposed to render a particular service—say, providing medical care or employment referrals—one would study the encounter episodes for all or a sampling of its clients over some stipulated period of time. To understand the differing experiences of blacks or women or elderly people, one would compare their encounter experiences with those of other groups.

Reaching Out

Cell 3 of Figure 1 also represents transactions that can be designated as bureaucratic encounters; they, too, are transactions in which one person is acting in his or her organizational role and the other person is not. The individual positions, however, are the mirror image of those described in Cell 2. In Cell 3 the transaction is initiated by a person acting as a member of an organization and it is directed toward a person who is not acting in an organizational role. The examples that come most quickly to mind involve agencies of government and circumstances in which the individual target of the transaction is more likely to be reluctant than welcoming.

Law enforcement, military conscription, and taxation are the three functions of government that have most often reached individual citizens on these terms. For all three the initiation of the transaction has become a classic in folklore and folk humor. The salutation "Greetings!" at the beginning of a letter from one's draft board, the invitation to visit the local office of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and the court summons or arrest have entered into the experience of millions of citizens, launching encounters they did not seek.

Another kind of transaction in which a person inside an organization reaches across the organizational boundary is sales. The insurance agent who calls on a prospective client exemplifies such a transaction. The selling of real estate or the urging of investment often takes this transactional form, and in earlier times so did automotive sales and a great deal of door-to-door selling. Selling need not, of course, take this form; the person who enters a department store and corners a salesperson is the initiator of the encounter.

Finally, Cell 3 includes those transactions that are currently called "outreach," the efforts of some service agency to take the initiative in locating and serving potential clients. Such activities have been made in a variety of domains—immunization against disease, community mental health, and compensatory education, for example. The subcategories of Cell 3 thus comprise transactions in which there is an organizational effort to provide some service of presumed benefit to the individual for which no direct payment is required, transactions in which services or products are offered on condition of payment, and transactions in which service or compensation is requested of the individual by the organizational representative.

Beyond the Organization

The fourth of our major categories (Cell 4) represents those transactions in which both the initiating person and the target or responding person are acting outside the boundaries of formal organizations. This is not to say that they are acting with utter spontaneity; they may be directed and constrained by social roles and norms no less powerful than those of formal organizations. Examples come from the relationships of marriage, parenthood, kinship, and friendship. The more casual and less prescriptive transactions between neighbors or strangers in public places are also included in the category represented by Cell 4; in all such transactions both persons are acting outside the context of formal organizations.

The transactions represented in Cell 4 have not been neglected by social scientists. Sociology typically includes marriage and family as a special area of study, and the study of kinship is central to anthropological research. But such fields have been conspicuous for differences of vocabulary and conceptual treatment, and there have been few attempts to bring their content into a framework that also contains organizational transactions.

Our assumption, on the other hand, is that it is both possible and useful to study these various transactional domains in the same conceptual terms, to a considerable extent. One of the purposes of the proposed schema (Figure 1) is to facilitate such study. Another is to urge greater attention to Cells 2 and 3, transactions that involve the *bridging of an organizational boundary.* Let us turn to the results of one such study, concerned primarily with Cell 2 transactions.

BUREAUCRATIC ENCOUNTERS—THE RESEARCH MODEL AND RESULTS

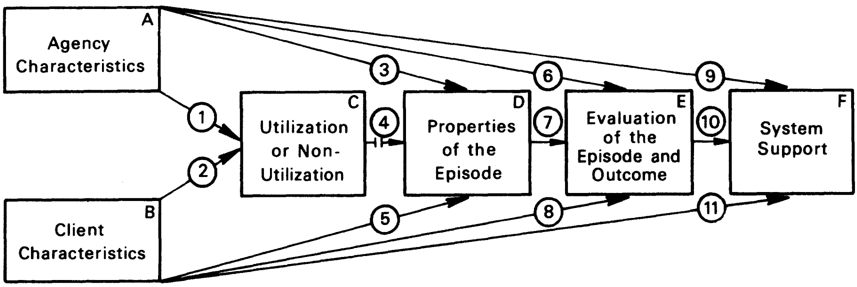
We (Katz, Gutek, Kahn, & Barton, 1975) have recently completed a project subtitled, "A Pilot Study in the Evaluation of Government Services." It is based on a nationwide survey of adults who were questioned about their experiences in seeking help when they were faced with any of seven problems: finding a job, getting training for a better job, getting compensation for illness or injuries sustained at work, getting unemployment compensation, getting medical care, getting retirement benefits, and getting economic assistance in the absence of such entitlements.[1]

There are, of course, many government agencies set up to serve persons with these problems. The dominant providers of these categorical services, however, are as follows: the state employment services, which handle job referrals, training, unemployment compensation; the Social Security Administration, which handles retirement benefits, certain supplemental stipends, and payments for Medicare and Medicaid; the Veterans Administration, which offers a wide range of services; Workers' Compensation, which assists people injured on the job; and the welfare agencies, most of which operate in very limited categories and with local authority. We proposed to study the encounters of persons with these agencies, insofar as such episodes could be reported by the individual who initiated them.

[1]A national sample of 1,431 adults (aged 18 and over) was interviewed by the field staff of the Survey Research Center (ISR, University of Michigan) in the spring of 1973. The sample is designed to represent dwellings in the coterminous United States, and includes 74 sample points. Within these 74 areas, a multistage procedure is followed, with probability selection enforced at each stage, including the final selection of household members within each sample dwelling.

The bureaucratic encounter can best be understood as the major intervening event in a causal sequence. It is an interactive product of certain characteristics of the client and those of the agency, including its representative. These characteristics determine, first of all, whether any encounter will occur; the potential client may be uninformed about the agency or discouraged by something he or she has heard, and thus may never attempt to utilize its services. If the person does approach the agency, an episode of service delivery (or refusal) occurs, and its properties can be assessed. These properties of the episode in turn predict certain immediate outcomes, particularly the client's evaluation of the episode, and have some implications for more remote events. In the latter category we were interested in the effects of the episode on clients' attitudes and beliefs about government services in general and about the larger social and political system. In addition to this causal sequence, we expect characteristics of agencies and clients to predict directly to episode evaluations and system support. This rudimentary model guided the research, and is illustrated as Figure 2.

FIGURE 2.
A Model for the Study of Bureaucratic Encounters



The model as drawn goes further than our data permit, and yet it is in several respects a simplification. For example, if the model is thought of in dynamic terms, as describing a process rather than a single episode, several feedback loops should be added. Some of the characteristics of clients at the beginning of an episode reflect in part their previous experiences with agencies, their evaluation of earlier treatment received, and the level of confidence and trust in the society (system support) that they have developed over the years. There is an additional potentiality for feedback between the evaluation of episodes and the characteristics of the agency; ideally, unsatisfactory evaluations would lead to changes in the agency itself.

The model should be elaborated also to distinguish between objective and subjective data, although the term *objective* should perhaps be set off by quotation marks. We should keep in mind, however, that the properties of the episode and the evaluation of it are likely to vary according to the source of the data. If it were practicable, we would obtain data from three sources—the client as one major actor in the situation, the agency representative as the other actor, and an independent third person who would have observed the encounter between the two.

The present study is based entirely on the responses of agency clients and "nonclients." People have described their problems or lack of them, their knowledge of government services, and their decision to seek such services, or not. Those who sought service have described their encounters with agencies, their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the outcomes, and their support or lack of it for the social and political system of which the agencies are creatures. For each cell in Figure 2, we shall present a few descriptive findings and the relationships to agency characteristics, client characteristics, and preceding events in the hypothesized sequence.

Utilization

Government services are widely utilized. It is not just small groups of people with special problems who make use of government agencies; a majority do. Approximately 58 per cent of all adults in our sample report contact with agencies in at least one of the seven areas of service included in this study. Rates of utilization vary considerably among those areas, however, from about 25 per cent for job-finding and unemployment compensation to 6 per cent for hospital and medical care (Table 1, column B).

We do not know what agency characteristics contribute to this pattern of differential utilization; we do know that low utilization does not mean absolute lack of need, although intensity of need is clearly involved. Among people who report having had different problems, the percentage who have not utilized the appropriate agency varies from 2 per cent for public assistance to 70 per cent for job training (Table 1, column D).

Knowledge or ignorance of the appropriate agency is probably the major factor in these cases. Knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient condition for utilization, and it is met in varying degrees for different problem areas. Of the people who reported having been injured or disabled on the job but who had not turned to a government agency for compensation, 49 per cent did not know that an appropriate service agency existed. Corresponding proportions for other areas in which underutilization is a significant problem range from 27 to 55 per cent (Table 1, column F). These numbers emphasize the importance of knowledge, and therefore the need for improving the dissemination of information about the availability of service and the means of access to government agencies. Nevertheless, the complementary percentages (Table 1, column E) remind us that the majority of people who have categorical problems for which government services are available and who do not seek those services *do* know of their availability. Their reluctance needs to be better understood.

We know more about the relationship of clients' demographic characteristics to the utilization of government service. Men are twice as likely as women to obtain work-related services, but women are twice as likely as men to obtain public assistance. Blacks are only one-third as likely as whites to receive retirement benefits, but they are twice as likely to utilize job-finding and job-training services. Government hospital and medical services, like public assistance, are used mainly by people low in income, education, and occupational status. Such findings reflect differences in opportunity structure and labor force experience, and resulting differences in entitlement and knowledge of service.

The dominant fact, nevertheless, is that demographic characteristics tell us only a modest amount about the utilization of government services. Nine demographic characteristics, used as predictors in a Multiple Classification Analysis in which the dependent variable was the number of service contacts, generate a multiple correlation of only .45 and thus explain only about 20 per cent of the variance in utilization. We can say of the United States as a whole what Janowitz, Wright, and Delany (1958) concluded about Detroit: "All the various strata, not just the lower social groups in the metropolitan community, have developed a stake in and a reliance on these new functions of government" (p. 102).

Properties of the Episode

The properties of the service-seeking episode, according to our model, would be predicted by properties of the agency and of the client. The decision to utilize the agency or not is a predictor of a different kind; it is a dichotomous variable, with a positive decision a necessary condition for the occurrence of the episode itself.

The resulting properties of the episode as such are conceptually distinct from the client's subsequent responses of evaluation and satisfaction, but the distinction is methodologically uncertain when all of our data about the episode come from the client's account of it. Nevertheless, and with a keen sense of the methodological problems involved in doing so, we have selected four items as describing episode characteristics. They are on the face of them descriptive rather than evaluative, refer directly to the episode rather than

TABLE 1.
Utilization of Various Types of Public Agencies in Relation to Knowledge About Them

Type of problem and agency	(A) Percentage of total sample having problem	(B) Percentage of total sample having problem and using agency	(C) Percentage of total sample having problem but not using agency (A–B)	(D) Percentage of people having problem who did not use agency (C/A)	(E) Percentage of people having problem and not using agency who know agency exists	(F) Percentage of people having problem and not using agency who did not know agency exists
Finding a job	33%	24%	9%	29%	72%	28%
Job training	30	9	21	70	54	46
Workers' Compensation	13	8	5	41	51	49
Unemployment Compensation	27	26	2	6	73	27
Public Assistance	12	12	0	2	—	—
Hospital and Medical care	8	6	2	26	45	55
Retirement	19	15	4	28	64	36
N	(1,431)	(1,431)	(1,431)			

The first three columns of this table present in sequence the prevalence of problems (Column A), the rate of utilization (Column B), and the rate of nonutilization for the population as a whole (Column C). Entries in all three columns are based on the total sample of 1,431. Column D uses a different base, not the total sample but only those people in the sample who reported having had the problem under inquiry; the *N*'s vary accordingly. Columns E and F use a third base, those people who reported having had the problem but not having used the agency. Columns E and F differentiate this latter group according to whether they knew of the agency (Column E) or did not know of it (Column F). The sequence of columns is thus intended to display the prevalence of each problem, the extent to which people use public agencies to get help with the problem, and the extent to which that rate of utilization reflects knowledge of the agencies' existence.

the outcome, and inquire about matters of concrete behavior. They are as follows:

> Was it hard to find an office or official who could handle your problem?
> How much effort did the people at the office make to help you?
> Do they give you any choice about things at the office or do you have to take what they decide?
> Was there someone at a higher level in the office to whom you could appeal for help if things were not working out all right?

If we make the normative assumptions that responsible officials should be easy to locate, that agency staff should strive to be helpful, that the right and means to appeal should be provided, and that clients should have some choice about the nature and process of the service, the properties of service episodes can be described as positive but not uniformly so. Certainly the search for an appropriate office and official is not usually Kafkaesque; four out of five clients report no difficulty of that sort, and three out of four say that the agency representatives make at least the "right" amount of effort to be helpful (Table 2).

Appeal procedures are less clear, however. About half of all clients are explicit about their availability, while another third are uncertain. (The uncertainty may mean that no attempt was made, and perhaps no need felt, to appeal.) Moreover, the picture changes further with respect to the element of client choice, with two out of three clients reporting that you "take what they decide." The criterion of client activity in this respect, however, may be more symptomatic of the values of the researchers than of the public; there is little evidence that the expectations or aspirations of most clients include playing an influential role in the decision-making process, although the social tendency seems to be in this direction.

Service episodes, however, are not unvarying; differences among agencies are both significant and consistent. The service-seeking episode goes best, by our criteria, with respect to retirement benefits (Social Security Administration) and worst with respect to medical and welfare services. Compared to the client seeking help with retirement benefits, the seeker after medical care is six times more likely to have difficulty finding an appropriate staff person, five times as likely to believe that little or no effort was made to provide help, and three times as likely to perceive no possibility of appeal from the staff decision. (See Table 2.)

The properties of episodes as experienced by different demographic groups are not independent of the preceding data, since demographic characteristics are related to the kinds of services sought. One must be 62 years of age or more to qualify for the retirement benefits of Social Security, for example, and there is no way of comparing the responses of old and young to this service. Demographic factors are not strong predictors of episode characteristics, however. Age is perhaps the strongest of them, with young people reporting more difficulty in locating appropriate staff members and less effort by staff to be helpful. Young people also report less uncertainty about appeal mechanisms, and are less convinced that they have to accept passively the agency decision about their request.

Other demographic variables, although they do not predict strongly to the properties of the service-seeking episode, show a consistent pattern. The

TABLE 2.
Type of Problem in Relation to Properties of Episode

Properties of episode	TYPE OF PROBLEM: Finding job	Job Training	Workers' Compensation	Unemployment Compensation	Welfare	Hospital/ Medical	Retirement	Other	Total
Hard to find office/official									
Yes	11%	13%	10%	8%	18%	31%	5%	27%	12%
No	86	85	85	88	79	69	90	71	83
D. K.	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	2	1
N. A.	3	2	2	4	2	0	4	0	4
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Staff effort to help									
More than had to	12%	25%	25%	4%	11%	20%	26%	24%	16%
About right	57	57	45	71	59	49	61	39	57
Less than should have	16	8	3	13	21	13	5	18	12
No effort at all	12	8	13	8	7	18	1	16	9
D. K.	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	2	1
N. A.	3	4	13	3	2	0	5	2	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Availability of appeal									
Yes	52%	43%	43%	57%	41%	39%	42%	40%	47%
No	9	21	8	11	19	22	8	31	14
D. K.	36	34	43	30	38	38	46	27	37
N. A.	3	2	8	3	2	2	4	2	3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Client choice									
Have a choice	51%	53%	18%	17%	11%	13%	16%	23%	26%
Take what they decide	37	43	70	74	87	80	76	63	66
D. K.	4	0	3	4	0	4	2	3	3
N. A.	9	4	10	4	2	2	5	10	6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	(171)	(53)	(40)	(162)	(103)	(45)	(172)	(62)	(809)

TABLE 3.
Age in Relation to Properties of Episode

Properties of Episode	Age groups				
	18-29	30-49	50-69	70+	Total
Hard to find office/official					
Yes	22%	13%	7%	5%	12%
No	73	82	88	89	83
D. K.	1	1	0	2	1
N. A.	4	4	5	5	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Staff effort to help					
More than had to	12	13	19	23	16
About right	45	61	61	63	57
Less than they should have	24	10	9	3	12
No effort at all	15	10	4	3	9
D. K.	0	1	0	1	1
N. A.	4	5	6	7	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Availability of appeal					
Yes	46	46	50	30	46
No	20	12	10	10	13
D. K.	30	37	35	48	36
N. A.	4	5	6	6	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Client choice					
Have a choice	31	30	21	11	25
Take what they decide	57	61	70	79	65
D. K.	5	1	1	4	3
N. A.	7	8	8	7	8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	(206)	(281)	(232)	(107)	(826)

episode is reported more positively by whites than blacks or other non-white racial groups, more positively by professional and managerial people than by those in other occupations, more positively by the highly educated than by those with less formal education. People in the highest income category ($15,000 and more) tend to be more positive than those in the range from $5,000 to $15,000, but those in the lowest income category are also relatively positive in describing the service-seeking episode.

Except for the curvilinearity in relation to income, these findings suggest two main conclusions: First, there is no evidence that the treatment of different demographic groups is grossly different. Second, the differences that are reported by clients suggest some tendency for white, educated, middle class clients of mature years to have an easier time.

Evaluation of the Episode

Our interests in clients' evaluations of their experiences in seeking service are both descriptive and predictive. We want to know what their feelings are and to what extent those feelings can be explained in terms of the reported properties of the episodes, the characteristics of the agencies, and those of the clients themselves.

The descriptive facts are generally positive. When people were asked directly about their most recent contact with a service agency, more than two out of three (69 per cent) expressed satisfaction with the way the agency handled their problem and almost half (43 per cent) reported themselves *very satisfied* (Table 5). Only 13 per cent took the opposite extreme, *very dissatisfied.*

These data are more easily stated than interpreted, however. They can be taken as showing the effective functioning of public service agencies or as indicating substantial deficiencies, depending on our frame of reference. It is not unimportant that 68 per cent of the client population report themselves satisfied, but a more ambitious standard might be proposed. In an imperfect world all clients cannot be satisfied, perhaps, but a goal of 80 or even 90 per cent might prove possible.

All three of the episode characteristics we have examined earlier (ease or difficulty in locating appropriate staff, effort of staff to be helpful, and amount of choice offered) are related to client satisfaction with the encounter (correlations of .45, .72, and .17, respectively). The data on which these correlations are based are presented in Table 4. As that table shows, less than one-sixth of the people who sought service had trouble locating the appropriate office and staff person; those who had such difficulty, however, were seven times more likely to be dissatisfied with the outcome of the episode. A similar pattern is apparent with respect to the reported effort of agency staff to be helpful; the client's perception of such effort is strongly related to satisfaction with the outcome. Clients do not feel that they have a right to influence or choice in the agency decision, at least not with the conviction that they feel entitled to ready access and reasonable effort to give service. Nevertheless, the clients' sense of choice is positively related to their satisfaction with the outcome of the episode itself. As Table 4 shows, this relationship is primarily visible in the larger proportion (57 per cent) of "very satisfied" clients among those who believe that they have some choice in the agency decision.

The fact that the characteristics of the episode and the evaluation of its outcome are both obtained from the responses of the client makes the evidence less compelling than we could wish. The relationships are consistent

TABLE 4.
Episode Characteristics in Relation to Client Satisfaction

PROPERTIES OF EPISODE	RATING					
	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatis-fied	Very dissatis-fied	Total	N
Hard to find office/official						
Yes	7%	20	16	57	100%	*101*
No	51	27	13	8	100	*672*
Agency effort to help						
More than had to	82	14	2	2	100	*131*
About right	49	40	9	2	100	*472*
Less than should have	1	7	50	42	100	*101*
None at all	4	3	11	81	100	*70*
Client choice						
Have a choice	57	26	11	6	100	*208*
Take what they decide	41	28	15	17	100	*532*

TABLE 5.
*Type of Agency (Presenting Problem) in Relation to Satisfaction**

RATING	TYPE OF PROBLEM								
	Finding job	Job training	Workers' Compensation	Unemployment Compensation	Welfare	Hospital/ Medical	Retirement	Other	Total
Very satisfied	35%	51%	53%	35%	27%	49%	64%	42%	43%
Fairly well satisfied	26	22	22	36	34	9	24	14	26
Somewhat dissatisfied	16	19	5	14	18	24	3	11	13
Very dissatisfied	20	6	10	12	19	18	3	29	13
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
Not ascertained	3	2	10	3	2	0	5	2	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	(171)	(53)	(40)	(162)	(103)	(45)	(173)	(62)	(827)

*Question: How satisfied were you with the way the office handled your problem?

with the model, however, and encourage the collection of independent data on service-delivering episodes. Meanwhile, the problems of methodological confounding are fewer with respect to our two remaining predictive categories, the type of problem and therefore the agency from which help is sought, and the demographic characteristics of the clients.

The various agencies are given markedly different evaluations by the publics they serve. The Social Security Administration heads the list, with 88 per cent of clients reporting themselves satisfied with the way their retirement problems are handled—64 per cent very satisfied. Workers' compensation and job training rank next, although the numbers are small. Greatest dissatisfaction is reported with job-finding services, unemployment compensation, and welfare. These data are consistent with other information about these agencies. For example, the Social Security offices probably have a simpler, better-defined mandate, at least with respect to retirement. They also have a better-defined clientele, and they have made determined efforts to establish contact with retirees. Moreover, the specifications and criteria for entitlement are relatively clear and nonjudgmental, and are therefore more likely to be accurately followed by local offices and understood by clients, at least in principle.

Finally, six demographic variables were examined to determine their effect on the clients' satisfaction. The variables were age, race, sex, income, education, and occupation. Age and race were the only demographic variables significantly related to satisfaction with the way the service agencies handle clients' problems. As age increases, so too does satisfaction with agency treatment. The relationship is pronounced in the extreme categories of *very satisfied* and *very dissatisfied,* with only 27 per cent of those under age 30 very satisfied compared to 60 per cent of the people over 70 years of age. Similar findings have been noted in other life domains, except for health (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). Age involves acceptance, and there are almost certainly cohort differences in level of expectation. Fewer blacks than whites are found in the very satisfied category (32 per cent as against 45 per cent).

Despite these differences, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions that people experience with government service are not explainable to any great extent in terms of demographic variables. While the most satisfied respondents were likely to be older, white, female, in the lowest or highest income brackets, and relatively well educated, the predictive power of each of these variables was quite low when others were held constant. Overall, age was the most consistent predictor, but all demographic variables in combination —age, race, income, sex, education, and occupation—correlate less than .4 with client satisfaction and explain only about 14 per cent of the variance in satisfaction scores among people who have sought government service.

A demographer might be disappointed with such results, but they are by no means undesirable in terms of social policy. Any society that aspires to equal treatment for its citizens must hope that their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with government services are not explainable in demographic terms. Differences among offices and agencies suggest administrative problems and solutions; idiosyncratic differences among clients are to some extent unavoidable; but systematic differences in the quality of service provided to different demographic groups imply deeper social problems.

System Support

The final link in our model of the service-seeking episode and its ramifications is the relationship between the client's evaluation of the episode and system support, the generalized evaluations that people make of their leaders, their government, and their society. System support is a complex notion and, as Easton (1965) and Miller (1972, 1973) have proposed, can be thought of as involving successive levels, ordered in terms of their concreteness and immediacy. Factor analysis (Katz, Gutek, Kahn, & Barton, 1975) suggests seven such categories of system support, four of which we shall present:

Evaluative ratings of government offices in general, with respect to promptness, fairness, consideration, accuracy, and the like;

Rejection of negative stereotypes about government, such as pervasive duplication of service, abuse of authority, unwillingness to take responsibility, and lack of personal interest;

Confidence in national leadership, with respect to use of tax monies, trust, commitment to social well-being, competence, and responsiveness to voters;

Interpersonal trust, that is, the general belief that people tend to be trustworthy, helpful, and fair.

The relationships between these criteria of system support and clients' evaluation of their own treatment when they sought service are presented in Table 6. All the relationships are positive, with correlations of .27, .23, .19, and .15, respectively. Several observations seem appropriate on the basis of these correlations and the supporting data. First, the findings are consistent with the hypothesis that one's experience with specific agencies generalizes to beliefs about government agencies as a whole. Second, and reasonably enough, the magnitude of these relationships is less than that of earlier links in the model, especially the relationship between properties of the episode and client evaluation of it.

Third, the relationship between one's experience and one's generalizations about government seems to depend more on unsatisfactory experiences than on those that are satisfactory. For example, as Table 6 shows, half of the people who are very dissatisfied with their own bureaucratic encounters

TABLE 6.
Satisfaction with Bureaucratic Encounters in Relation to System Support

MEASURES OF SYSTEM SUPPORT	RATING			
	Satisfied		**Dissatisfied**	
	Very	**Somewhat**	**Somewhat**	**Very**
General Evaluation of government offices				
High	29%	22	12	8%
Medium	50	55	54	42
Low	21	23	24	50
Total	100%	100	100	100%
Rejection of negative stereotypes about government				
High	33	25	20	12
Medium	30	32	30	17
Low	37	43	50	71
Total	100%	100	100	100%
Confidence in national leadership				
High	49	46	42	23
Medium	16	18	15	19
Low	35	36	43	58
Total	100%	100	100	100%
Interpersonal trust				
High	34	34	25	25
Medium	41	31	33	32
Low	25	34	42	43
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	(348)	(212)	(102)	(110)

rate all government agencies low, but only 29 per cent of the people who are very satisfied with their own experience rate government agencies generally high. Similarly, a large majority (71 per cent) of people with very unsatisfactory experiences accept (low rejection) negative stereotypes about government; only a third of those with very satisfactory experiences reject such stereotypes. It is as if dissatisfaction has a quality of contagion that satisfaction lacks. Fourth, the relationships presented in Table 6 become attenuated as one moves from top to bottom; that is, as the criteria of system support become increasingly general and remote from the client experience itself.

Demographic characteristics have some direct association with system support, but the relationships are modest. The poor (incomes below $5,000) differ very little from the affluent (incomes above $15,000) on most measures of system support, although they are somewhat less confident in national leadership and less trusting of people in general. Young people tend to be somewhat more critical of government and less trusting of people in general;

in other respects age seems to make little difference. Race, on the other hand, does make a difference: blacks are twice as likely as whites to express lack of confidence in national leadership and lack of trust in others. Both attitudes may be minority statements about majority behavior.

CONCLUSIONS AND EXTENSIONS

This article can be summarized in terms of four objectives, all of which derive from the conviction that theory and research on formal organizations have tended to neglect boundary transactions. First, we proposed a schema (Figure 1) that illustrates that conviction by showing that organizational behavior, as it is usually studied, deals with only one of four broad domains of interpersonal transactions, three of which are in fact "organizational."

Second, we urged the importance of the domain of "bureaucratic encounters" (Cell 2, Figure 1), which includes those boundary transactions in which a potential client outside an organization approaches an individual inside with a request for service, admittance, or help of some other kind.

Third, we proposed a model (Figure 2) for the study of such encounters, as part of a causal sequence that begins with the characteristics of agency and client, and ends with the client's support (or lack of it) for the larger social system.

Finally, we presented data from a recent study of bureaucratic encounters. Although it has the advantage of being based on a representative national sample, it is a pilot study and its value lies partly in the lines of research which it suggests. The most obvious would be a broader and more intensive inquiry into the delivery of government services as experienced by citizens. The present study was restricted to a few categories of service and was limited to an interview of about 30 minutes.

Three other extensions suggest themselves. One would develop more fully the causal model presented in Figure 2. The present study does little to eliminate the relationship between organizational properties of service-delivering agencies and the quality of the services delivered. A study that included independent measures of agency characteristics and of the delivery episodes themselves would provide such information. Such an extension of the present work, involving more intensive examination of selected agencies and offices, would test the proposed model and provide data more directly usable for the improvement of service.

Another extension of the present research would lead to the private sector and to a comparison of public and private modes of service delivery. The private sector deserves study in its own right, and a number of services are provided both by public and private organizations. Money is lent, compensation awarded, medical care given, employment arranged by agencies of government, by private enterprise, and by various kinds of nonprofit organizations. Their similarities and differences are little understood and have large implications, theoretical and pragmatic.

Finally, we envision research that builds on the transactional model presented as Figure 1. Such research, replicated at intervals, would provide an important addition to existing social indicators. It would tell us the similarities and differences among four domains that together define most of social life—one's experiences as a member of organizations, as a client, as a willing or unwilling target of some organizational initiative, and as an individual outside the organizational orbit. It would tell us to what extent each of these domains is gaining or losing in importance, and something of the consequences of such social tendencies for the quality of life. If the present study stimulates research in these sectors of organizational and extra-organizational behavior, it will have served its purpose well.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. *Personality and organization.* New York: Harper, 1957.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., & Rodgers, W. *The quality of American life.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976.

Easton, D. A. *A systems analysis of political life.* New York: Wiley, 1965.

Emery, F. E., &Trist, E. L. The causal texture of organizational environments. *Human Relations,* 1965, **18,** 21-32. Reprinted in F. E. Emery (Ed.), *Systems thinking.* Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1969.

Evan, W. M. The organization-set: Toward a theory of interorganizational relations. In J. D. Thompson (Ed.), *Approaches to organizational design.* Pittsburgh, Pa.: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966.

Fiedler, F. E. *Leadership.* New York: General Learning Press, 1971.

Janowitz, M., Wright, D., & Delany, W. *Public administration and the public—perspectives toward government in a metropolitan community.* Ann Arbor: Bureau of Government, Institute of Public Administration, University of Michigan, 1958.

Katz, D., Gutek, B. A., Kahn, R. L., & Barton, E. *Bureaucratic encounters: A pilot study in the evaluation of government services.* Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1975.

Lawrence, P. R., & Lorsch, J. W. *Organization and environment.* Boston: Harvard Business School, Division of Research, 1967.

Likert, R. *New patterns of management.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

McGregor, D. *The human side of enterprise.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960.

Miller, A. H. Political issues and trust in government: 1964-1970. Paper delivered at 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 1972.

Miller, A. H., Brown, T. A., & Raine, S. Social conflict and political estrangement, 1958-1972. Paper delivered at the 1973 Midwest Political Science Association Convention, 1973.

Presthus, R. *The organizational society.* New York: Knopf, 1962.

Pugh, D. S., Hickson, D. J., Hinings, C. R., & Turner, C. The context of organization structure. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 1969, **14,** 91-114. Reprinted in W. E. Scott and L. L. Cummings, *Readings in organizational behavior and human performance,* Rev. ed. Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1973.