the public interest involves open participative processes within and outside of organizations, then those processes must be designed to foster the involvement of all types of people with all types of perspectives and worldviews. As our nation becomes more diverse and we increasingly interact with other nations around the globe, it is imperative that public administrators become culturally competent so as to better understand and serve the changing needs of communities and citizens. We have explored the ideas of diversity and multiculturalism throughout this book, but we should be reminded of their importance as we think about the values of public service.

The second issue, which we explore in this chapter, is ethics. There are a number of key ethical factors and perspectives that are critical in our efforts to realize and reflect the values of democracy and the public interest in public organizations. In a very real sense, there are normative issues involved in almost everything that public organizations and public administrators do. How can we manage organizational behavior in a manner that respects the rights of the individual, adheres to democratic principles, and engenders trust, commitment, and involvement? What ethical standards should guide our behavior and create the context for our work?

The third issue, one also explored in this chapter, involves the manner in which we define the nature of public service and the role that both individual public servants and public organizations play in democratic governance. We describe the normative foundations for what we call the “new public service,” marked by a commitment to serving citizens, broad-based involvement in goal setting and decision making, and respect for all people. In so doing, we suggest that the public service plays a vital and profound role in realizing the ideals of democracy. In playing this role, the question of how we exercise leadership and manage organizational behavior is a central and enduring theme.

The Ethics of Managing Change

Although many consider management to be a fairly technical endeavor, there are important value questions that affect almost everything that managers do. Managers deal with humans and play a significant role in shaping the lives of those within and outside of their organizations. In so doing, they bear a special responsibility to their employees and the citizens they serve, a responsibility to engage in behavior that is not only efficient and effective but also ethical. In this section, we consider some of the values that enter into managers’ relationships with their employees.

Earlier, we reviewed some of the ways in which the manager tries to bring about change in the organization, including change through management action or reorganization and change brought about by reshaping the culture or learning capacity of the organization. But in any effort in organizational change, the wishes of the manager are, to some extent, imposed on other people in the organization. If these people were left to their own devices, then they might act in quite different ways. But because of their roles and commitments within the organization, they act in the way that their manager desires.

Obviously, most efforts at organizational change involve attempts to maximize efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity in the organization. But these values are
the values of management and might not necessarily be those of employees. For this reason, most attempts to transform organizations require managers to change the value system of the organization and its members in some way. That is, as Woodall (1996) put it, “It has become received wisdom that high levels of commitment and performance require employees to espouse values that are aligned with the managerial vision” (p. 28). In this view, the question becomes one of how the manager can persuade, entice, or co-opt others into following his or her vision of the organization and its future.

McKendall (1993) argued that most organizational change efforts actually serve to increase the power of management relative to others in the organization. This occurs for several reasons. First, planned change, especially strategic change, typically is initiated by top management and implicitly bears the message that top management not only is in control but also has a “right” to be in control. Second, as we saw in Chapter 12, planned change creates uncertainty and ambiguity in the organization. Under these conditions, employees might seek stability through conformity to the wishes and desires of those who appear to be “in charge.” Third, efforts at organizational change involve management defining a new “reality” for the organization’s members. “It reaffirms the right of management to define the ‘order’ of the organization” (McKendall, 1993, p. 99). The basic question becomes one of how managers can secure compliance with their wishes.

Obviously, stating the problem in this way makes more apparent the possible ethical dilemmas that the managers may confront in attempts to change or transform the organization. At some point, change can become coercion, and influence can become manipulation—and there might be a very fine line between the two. Even though modern management expresses distaste for the old authoritarian biases of past management practices, there still are activities that managers engage in that have the effect of devaluing, and even dehumanizing, their employees. Being aware of some of the potential ethical dilemmas that are inherent in management and especially organizational change can help the manager to be more sensitive to the concerns of others in the organization and to be more likely to act in a consistently ethical manner. There are two areas that deserve our attention. First, who determines the need for change, the intended outcomes, and the organization’s values? Second, how can managers instill change in a way that is both effective and ethical?

The first question—who determines the need for change—may be addressed by thinking through the various obligations that public administrators have. Obviously, a manager (whether in a public or private organization) who pursues organizational change for his or her own self-interest would be acting in an unethical manner. But public administrators have a further obligation—to undertake change only as it is consistent with their obligations as public servants. Public agencies and their managers are, first and foremost, accountable to the public. As Cooper (1998) put it, “It seems reasonable to expect that someone who accepts employment in a public fiduciary role [will] act generally in accordance with the values of the citizenry as expressed through a political system and direct citizen participation” (p. 69). More specifically, public administrators are expected to behave in a way that is consistent with the wishes of elected officials, especially as reflected in legislation. This means that a public administrator who changes the value system of his or her organization in such a way that it no longer is consistent with legislation has acted in an unethical
manner. Moreover, if an administrator acts outside of the law or his or her delegated authority in planning or implementing change, then this also would be considered unethical (Svara, 2006).

Beyond their obligations as public servants, public managers (indeed all managers) must face the question of the extent to which their imposing their values on others or their directing the behavior of others represents a violation of their employees’ freedom and autonomy. Lippitt and Lippitt (1978), in a well-known book on organizational consultation, wrote,

> In the eyes of those persons who hold the enhancement of man’s freedom of choice as a fundamental value, any deliberate influencing of the behavior of others constitutes a violation of their basic humanity. On the other hand, effective behavior change involves some degree of utilization of power and control and a potential imposition of the change agent’s values on the client system. (p. 70)

Certainly, we typically assume that by involving ourselves in organizations, we give up some of our decision-making autonomy. But we also recognize that there are limits on the extent to which those in positions of power and authority can impose their will on others. Some such restraints are formal and specific, and they protect the rights of employees (e.g., prohibitions on sexual harassment). Others are more general. For example, the current emphasis on empowerment in organizations presents a significantly different answer to the question of power and control in organizations than that given by the early proponents of top-down “scientific management.” Moreover, we recognize that some organizations are more open and involving of lower-level participants than are others. In either case, merely by asking the question, we acknowledge that there is an ethical question concerning the extent to which managers can impose their values on employees. This goes to the second question—how managers can bring about change in a way that is both effective and ethical.

We can begin to address this issue by noting when managers’ activities would be unethical. For example, we generally would label as unethical actions that would coerce employees into certain behaviors. “Coercion takes place when one person or group forces another person or group to act or refrain from acting under threat of severe deprivation” such as the loss of one’s life, job, or well-being (Warwick & Kelman, 1973). Obviously, we would find overt acts of coercion to be objectionable, but in fact coercion is not always overt. Again, although most contemporary management theories favor more open and involving styles of management, there still are situations in which employees are told essentially to “shape up or ship out.” Whether these actions are unethical is perhaps only possible to judge within the context of particular activities, but they certainly raise not just technical issues but ethical ones as well. (We should, of course, point out that in addition to the ethical question that coercion raises, in the long run coercion is not likely to be effective anyway. At a minimum, it generates resentment, but beyond that it can lead to strikes, employee turnover, or even sabotage.)
Many of the same issues that we associate with coercion also can be raised with respect to manipulation. Although manipulation is a somewhat vaguer concept, it generally is taken to mean a type of interpersonal influence in which the manipulator intentionally deceives the target. Seabright and Moberg (1998) suggested that manipulation can be classified in two categories: (1) situational manipulation (in which the circumstances within which the target acts are so structured that the target sees no apparent alternatives) and (2) psychological manipulation (in which the target’s efforts to make sense of a situation are confused or misdirected). “Manipulation operates by robbing the victim of autonomy either in choice (situational manipulation) or in self-definition (psychological manipulation) for the sole purpose of advancing the perpetrator’s objective” (Seabright & Moberg, 1998, p. 167). The results are actions that are not freely undertaken.

We can easily think of examples of manipulation in organizations—fooling someone into doing something by the use of flattery or lies, playing on the emotions of someone to get one’s own way, making the target think that the agent’s way was his or her own idea, and so on. In any case, as with coercion, manipulative tactics that involve deception, threats, fear, secrecy, and dishonesty should be considered unethical. But manipulation sometimes is difficult to identify because it is so closely related to persuasion and facilitation, neither of which has quite the same negative connotation as manipulation. But in terms of organizational change, White and Wooten (1983) argued, “Basically, manipulation and coercion can occur when the organizational development effort requires organizational members to abridge their personal values or needs against their will” (p. 691). As with coercion, there may be practical negative consequences as well in that manipulation is likely to breed anger, fear, resentment, and hostility.

The question of autonomy leads to a final consideration—that organizational change efforts can become dehumanizing and therefore ethically questionable. Basically, this argument would hold that efforts at organizational change that suppress human development or limit the individual’s pursuit of meaning, autonomy, and independence raise substantial ethical issues. Many, of course, have argued that modern organizations, by their very nature, have tendencies toward dehumanization. What often is termed the rational model of administration primarily focuses on the organization achieving its objectives with the greatest possible efficiency. Efficiency becomes the key value in that model. But it does so by disregarding the question of human meaning. Individual members of the organization are not valued per se but only as means to given ends. Indeed, a major justification of the rational model is that it can help to eliminate those bothersome human qualities—such as feelings, emotions, and values—that might interfere with the efficient pursuit of the organization’s objectives. The individual is not granted autonomy or meaning but rather is viewed in an instrumental fashion—valued only as a contributor to the organization’s objectives. Employees are forced into narrowly defined roles in the hierarchy so that their contributions can be regulated and controlled.

As with coercion and manipulation, dehumanization raises not only important ethical issues but also practical ones—dissatisfaction, lack of innovation, groupthink, and the creation of an overly conformist culture in which productive conflict
cannot be found. Woodall (1996) summarized the ethical issues in organizational change in this way:

The role of change agents, and above all the process whereby a cultural change is introduced, are surrounded by ethical dilemmas. These do not just concern the inherent worth of the exercise or its benefit to the organization. They also include the impact on individual motivation to comply and above all the infringement of individual autonomy, privacy, self-esteem, and equitable treatment. (p. 35)

Reviewing the ethics of organizational behavior leads us to ask how public managers can bring about change while still maintaining a sense of democratic responsibility and whether efforts at organizational change can be carried out in a way that avoids coercion, manipulation, or dehumanization. In either case, an appropriate response is to suggest that doing those things that promote the autonomy and independent involvement of individual citizens or employees provides the best possible ethical response. Indeed, one of the most significant ethical issues facing public managers is how they can fully involve all of those individuals both within and outside of the organization who should play a role in decisions concerning the work of the public service (Svara, 2006). Public administration is, of course, different in the sense that, because public servants are involved in the governance process, they must constantly deal with issues such as justice, fairness, and equity. Every act of every public servant, whether in the formulation or implementation of public policy, is permeated with ethical concerns.

The New Public Service

As public administrators, the values and assumptions that we hold about our roles and responsibilities in a democracy set the parameters for our actions. How we behave, and how we seek to influence the behavior of others in the public service, is inherently and fundamentally grounded in how we see government and our role in government. What are the key elements of a normative foundation for the field of public administration, and how do those elements speak to the management of organizational behavior in the public interest?

There is considerable disagreement about this question. This disagreement is important and interesting in its own right but also has implications for how we manage organizational behavior. Some have suggested, for example, that public administration can best serve citizens by reinventing government and following the tenets of the “new public management” (Kaboolian, 1998; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Osborne & Plastrik, 1997). This view suggests that public administrators should take actions to rid government of hierarchical controls and bureaucratic models of management in favor of a view of government in which the relationship between public agencies and their “customers” is understood as based on transactions similar to those that occur in the marketplace. In this view, public administrators should see themselves as public entrepreneurs creating mechanisms for citizens to make choices