



Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics

Author(s): Alexander Wendt

Source: *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1992), pp. 391-425

Published by: [The MIT Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>

Accessed: 15/10/2011 09:10

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White House Staff Versus the Cabinet: Centripetal and Centrifugal Roles

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The first task of any new administration must be the organization of the White House and the establishment of the role the cabinet will play.¹ If these central issues are not settled, the President will have trouble pursuing any of his political or governmental priorities. And if there are problems within or between these two central institutions in an administration, much valuable time can be lost until the tensions are settled. The early months of an administration are particularly crucial to a new president because they provide a narrow window of opportunity to accomplish his goals.

If the president does not designate early who will be first among his White House staff, it is an invitation to struggle; for much is at stake. The President's program will necessarily wait while the battle for who is in charge is settled. The Carter administration lost a lot of time while the relative positions of Hamilton Jordan and Jack Watson were established. This struggle helped to negate some of the other elaborate preparations the administration had undertaken during the transition. Time was also lost and energy misspent in the Ford and the Carter presidencies while each president experimented with a "spokes of the wheel" model of White House organization and refused to designate a chief of staff.

Presidents must also set early ground rules for the role that cabinet members will play in the administration and the appropriate relationship between the White House staff and the Cabinet. It must be clear what is and is not delegated before cabinet secretaries get established in their departments. If this is not done it will be very difficult to call presumed delegations back in. Presidents Nixon and Carter both felt that they had delegated too much to their cabinet secretaries personnel selection. Both administrations later found this to be an expensive mistake when they finally resorted to firing and replacing several cabinet members in order to regain control, Nixon after the 1972 election and Carter in the summer of 1979.

This article will examine issues involved in the organization of the White House and its relationship with the Cabinet. It will point out some lessons that can be learned from recent presidencies.

Organizing the White House

Presidents choose their White House staffs primarily from those who have worked with them on their campaigns for very good reasons. Those who have worked closely with the new president on the campaign understand best the personality and values of the president. More importantly, the president has confidence in the judgment of the people who have weathered the storms of campaigning with him and, according to John Ehrlichman, "The president's confidence is the only qualification for working in the White House."² In addition, "you use your own campaign organization because people know each other" and are used to working together.³

This natural choice of campaign aides, however, may lead to problems, because the nature of governing is substantially different from the nature of political campaigns. Bradley Patterson, with fourteen years working experience in the White House, argues that "The virtues needed in the crucible of a campaign—are almost the opposite of the preparation needed for life within the White House."⁴

In a political campaign issues must be simplified and differences accentuated; in the White House issues take on "infinite shades of grey." Simplification will not help the president deal with the tough issues. In a campaign people are either for you or against you, and the latter are seen as the enemy. But in the White House coalitions must be built to gain support for the president's programs, and the country must be united behind the administration. In a campaign publicity is avidly sought; exposure of the candidate and his staff contributes to making the maximum impact on voters' minds. In the White House, however, the staff must have that "passion for anonymity" of which Louis Brownlow spoke. A high public profile for staff members decreases the President's visibility and is no service to him. Patterson asks: "Can a hard-driving, fast-moving bunch of egotists be so metamorphosed between November 5 and January 20?" His answer is "Perhaps."⁵

Because of the types of people who are successful in getting appointments to the White House staff and because of the type of atmosphere that exists at the highest levels of power, the best in people is not always brought out. There is the opportunity for greatness, but also for the abuse of power. In his book on presidential staffs from Roosevelt through Johnson, Patrick Anderson describes White House staff members: "They tend to be young, highly intelligent, and unashamedly on the make. They take chances, they cut corners, and unlike most politicians they sometimes have a little spontaneity and irreverence left in them. This accounts for much of their charm and most of their problems."⁶

The combination of personality types in the presence of great power and pressure to achieve short term political goals combine to make the White House a peculiar cauldron fraught with danger as well as opportunity. "Policy differences, piled on top of personality clashes, multiplied by the time pressures, and heated by sometimes vindictive news leaks, can add up to an incandescent plasma of high-voltage conflict."⁷ With the particular personality types likely to be in the White House and the pressure filled atmosphere, organizational issues take on extraordinary importance.

Eisenhower and Kennedy Models Contrasted

The two main models of White House organization in the contemporary presidency are the Eisenhower and the Roosevelt-Kennedy models. Recent presidents have seemed to want to imitate President Eisenhower's system of cabinet organization but not necessarily his White House organization. Eisenhower's participation in staff advisory systems in the military led him to the conclusion that the White House must be organized much more formally than Truman and Roosevelt had organized theirs. While good organization would not guarantee good advice, according to Eisenhower it would enhance the likelihood of efficiency. "Organization cannot make a genius out of an incompetent. On the other hand, disorganization can scarcely fail to result in inefficiency."⁸ Eisenhower insisted that as many issues as possible be settled below the Presidential level and that issues be presented for his consideration on one page memoranda.

The driving force behind the Eisenhower White House staff system was Sherman Adams who came to dominate the White House with an iron hand. Adams said that his job was "to manage a staff that would boil down, simplify and expedite the urgent business that had to be brought to Eisenhower's personal attention and to keep as much work of secondary importance as possible off his desk."⁹ He controlled who saw the President, and most cabinet officers reported to the President through him. He seemed to dominate White House policy so thoroughly that one newspaper ran a story headline declaring: "Adams Insists Ike is Really President."¹⁰

One of the useful functions Adams performed was to absorb flack when the president made an unpopular decision on a minor matter. Adams could be seen as the "abominable no man" or the one who denied access to the president. This helped maintain Eisenhower's image as a benevolent leader not concerned with petty politics.¹¹ On the other hand a chief of staff with tight control of access to the President can isolate the President from diverse points of view and keep him from seeing people whom he ought to see. Greenstein argues that this was not the case with Adams and Eisenhower, though the issue was raised later with regard to the Nixon presidency.

When John Kennedy was elected he was strongly urged by his advisors to reject the Eisenhower model of White House organization and to adopt a system closer to that of Franklin Roosevelt. In his memorandum, "Staffing the President-Elect," Richard Neustadt described the type of organization Kennedy might adopt:

You would be your own "chief of staff" . . . For if you follow my advice you will commit yourself not to each detail of Rooseveltian practice . . . but to the *spirit* of his presidential operation; whereby *you* would oversee, coordinate, and interfere with virtually everything your staff was doing. A collegial staff has to be managed; competition has to be audited.¹²

Clark Clifford also urged Kennedy to reject the Eisenhower model with its dominant chief of staff.¹³ In a memorandum to Kennedy he argued: "A vigorous President in the Democratic tradition of the Presidency will probably find it best to act as his own chief of staff, and to have no highly visible majordomo standing between him and his staff, (and, incidently, between him and the public). It is important that all

the senior professional persons on the staff should have access to the President, and the staff should consist of no more persons than can conveniently have such access on a day-to-day basis.”¹⁴

Kennedy followed the advice of Clifford and Neustadt and ran a loosely structured White House with several senior aides having access to the president. Although Theodore Sorensen was his principle advisor, he never became the keeper of the gate that Adams was for Eisenhower or Haldeman was for Nixon. Kennedy’s White House Operation also contrasted with Eisenhower’s with respect to the delegation of authority to the cabinet.

Lyndon Johnson continued the Kennedy model of using a fluid, unstructured White House staff. While Kennedy, like Roosevelt, dominated the White House staff with his intelligence and choice of which assignments to dole out to whom; Johnson carried his personal domination of White House staff members to extremes. Jack Valenti recalls how Johnson treated his staff.

He brutalized them, always tried to shove spoonfuls of humility through their clenched teeth. He never named any of his aides to be chief of staff. He kept some aides unenlightened as to his thinking even as he instructed others in several directions at the same time. . . . He once said: “If anyone is going to make a big-ass blunder around here, I want it to be me and not some assistant to me who thinks he is running the country.” He made sure everyone knew the source of their power: “Now you very important guys ought to keep one thing in mind. The folks tonight who tell you how smart you are and how charming you are don’t give a pig’s ass about you personally. They think you can get to me. They also know you won’t be around this Oval Office one second longer than me.”¹⁵

The lack of structure in Johnson’s White House and Johnson’s style of dominating his staff led Patrick Anderson to entitle a section of his chapter on the Johnson White House Staff “Caligula’s Court.”¹⁶ The White House under Johnson was so unstructured that when a new aide reported for duty and asked for an organization chart he was told by an amused career official who had been in the White House for thirty years: “We don’t have any organization chart at the White House because we don’t have any organization.”¹⁷

Nixon’s White House

In contrast to the Kennedy and Johnson loosely structured styles, President Nixon began his administration with a clear cut White House organization. While staff members would change, the lynchpin of the organization, H.R. Haldeman, maintained the same tight control over the White House. According to Haldeman “You’ve got to establish a clear cut organizational structure” in order to keep staff rivalries and competition for the President’s ear from dominating the policy process. “We all knew where we fit. There were five of us that were equal, but as Bryce Harlow said: there was a first among equals, and it was clearly me. Nobody questioned it. I never asserted it; I never argued it. I never had to.”¹⁸

While others saw Haldeman as a barrier between them and the president and

suspected that the White House staff was arrogating much power to itself; Haldeman saw his role as merely acting at the direction of the President. "If I told someone to do something, he knew it wasn't me—he knew exactly what it was; it was an order from the President. They knew an appeal wouldn't get anywhere."¹⁹ According to this view every President needs someone who will make the tough decisions about protecting the President's time and who will shield the president from having to make unpleasant face-to-face decisions about personnel. Haldeman characterized himself: "Every President needs a son of a bitch, and I'm Nixon's. I'm his buffer and I'm his bastard. I get done what he wants done and I take the heat instead of him."²⁰

One of the assets of a close staff aide that is almost an alter ego to the president is that he can weigh what the president says and discount it if in his judgment the President made a poor decision out of pique. Haldeman often stalled and did not implement petty or vindictive orders until Nixon had cooled down.²¹ Nixon also counted on Haldeman to protect his time and shield him from unnecessary demands. This was a valuable service in that it drew flack from disappointed seekers of appointments from the President to Haldeman.

The reaction in the country to the Watergate scandals was so strong that the next two Presidents felt a need to distance themselves and their administrations from the Nixon legacy. This led Presidents Ford and Carter to begin their terms with promises of open access to the President and a spokes of the wheel structure of White House organization. Each was forced to admit failure after a period of attempting to run the White House without a chief of staff.

The Ford and Carter Reactions

Upon succeeding to the Presidency after Nixon's resignation, President Ford took pains to distinguish his administration from Nixon's.²² He spoke of a return to "cabinet government" and an open presidency that would not have a powerful White House staff standing between the President and his advisors or cabinet members. "A Watergate was made possible by a strong chief of staff and ambitious White House aides who were more powerful than members of the Cabinet but who had little or no practical experience in judgement. I wanted to reverse the trend. . . ."²³

Thus Ford began his administration with nine people reporting to him and with the intention of running his White House without a chief of staff who might evoke the specter of H.R. Haldeman. But in order to lend some sort of coherence to a White House staff of over 500 people, Ford designated Donald Rumsfeld to be "Staff Coordinator." And after several months in office even Ford had to admit that something akin to a chief of staff was necessary in order to run the White House. Ford explained: "Someone, I decided, had to be responsible for scheduling appointments, coordinating the paper flow, following up on decisions I had made and giving me status reports on projects and policy development. I didn't like the idea of calling this person chief of staff, but that was the role he would fill."²⁴

In the Winter of 1975 Ford appointed Rumsfeld to be Secretary of Defense and his deputy Richard Cheney took over as Ford's chief of staff. Cheney perceived his role as chief of staff to be to impose order on presidential advice, but to do it in a

low key manner that kept himself out of the spotlight and in the background. Cheney viewed himself as an honest broker who saw to it that all views were presented to the President. This had to be apparent to Cabinet members and the rest of the White House staff in order to prevent them from trying to establish back channels to the President in order to get their own views heard. "It is important that the rest of the troops feel that we will honestly present their position to the president."²⁵ But Cheney concluded from his experience in the White House that the Roosevelt system will no longer work: "Somebody has to be in charge."²⁶

At a White House staff party Cheney was presented with a bicycle wheel mounted on a large board with all of the spokes of the wheel mangled and tangled except for one which was the only thing holding the structure together. A plaque mounted on the board read: "The spokes of the wheel: a rare form of management artistry as conceived by Don Rumsfeld and modified by Dick Cheney." When the Ford administration left office on January 20, 1977 Cheney left the present on his desk and appended a note reading "Dear Ham, beware the spokes of the wheel."²⁷

When Jimmy Carter came to office he did not heed Cheney's warning. Carter, like Ford, was reacting to Watergate and the Nixon Presidency and promised Cabinet Government with no powerful White House staff. "I believe in Cabinet administration of our government. There will never be an instance while I am President when the members of the White House staff dominate or act in a superior position to the members of our cabinet."²⁸

Carter also started out with nine advisors reporting to him, and he intended to be his own chief of staff. This came naturally for Carter who prided himself as a good manager and who enjoyed (or was obsessed with) the details of policy and management. This led to a situation in which it was difficult in the executive branch to determine who was in charge, and from the perspective of Congress it was not clear who were the key actors and decision makers in the White House. The situation was also aggravated by the transition conflict between the Watson and Jordan staffs. Valuable time was lost in waiting for the dispute to be resolved; and while Jordan was unquestionably the winner, Carter refused to give him unambiguous authority over the White House staff.

Carter tolerated the lack of any formal chief of staff until July of 1979 when he finally admitted the obvious need and officially appointed Jordan to the post. Later, when Jordan moved to work on the 1980 campaign, Jack Watson took over the title. In retrospect both Jack Watson and Stuart Eizenstat have concluded that it is important to have one person in charge of the White House staff.²⁹

The Reagan White House

The Reagan administration came to office with the conscious intention of avoiding the mistakes they thought that President Carter had made. One of the ways they did this was that Edwin Meese, who had run the transition was put in charge of policy, the cabinet and national security. But Meese was not the president's only top staff aide. He shared his primacy with Michael Deaver and James Baker. Thus

Reagan's White House was organized in a modified spokes of the wheel and chief of staff system.³⁰

On November 17, 1980 Meese and Baker came to an agreement on the division of duties between them and, as befits two lawyers, wrote it down in a memorandum that was initialed by each. Meese would have Cabinet rank while Baker would not. Meese would coordinate the work of the Domestic Policy Staff and the National Security Council staff. Baker got the traditional office of the chief of staff and control of the paper flow to the President and hiring and firing authority in the White House staff.³¹

This division of labor, though it was not immediately obvious, was loaded in favor of Baker. Meese would have responsibility for the long term Reagan agenda and Baker would dominate day to day operations. It is a predictable rule that in the White House day-to-day fire fighting drives out longer range (six months or longer) planning. Baker's control of operations, paper flow, and personnel would give him the upper hand.

Michael Deaver, who was personally closest to the President, ran his scheduling, travel, support services, and the First Lady's office. Deaver was not particularly interested in issues or policy, but saw himself as the steward of the presidential image and protector of the president's time.³²

The White House organization of domination by Troika (or Quadrumvirate when Clark was there) seemed to work very well for the first part of the administration. The first year victories seemed to be engineered quite well by the functional separation of duties among the three top advisors. They all had direct access to the President, and they coordinated their work with daily meetings and a minimum of friction. In late 1983, however, reports began to surface that some of the traditional problems of lack of monocratic hierarchy were being felt.

The problems stemmed from the fact that no one staff member was clearly in charge and the president was not closely enough engaged in policy making and administration to settle disputes quickly. One White House official who had served other presidents said: "I've never worked in an organization like this. There is no one person to give orders, except the President. This lends itself to jockeying for position and not letting anyone else get too far ahead."³³ Despite these scattered complaints, the triumvirate continued to dominate the White House throughout President Reagan's first term.

In the second term Baker moved out of the White House to take over the Treasury while Treasury Secretary Donald Regan came to the White House to be chief of staff. With Meese at the head of the Justice Department, Regan proceeded to centralize control of the White House in himself. The process was facilitated by the departure of first term Reagan advisors Max Friedersdorf and Ed Rollins, as well as OMB Director David Stockman. The experiment with the troika was abandoned to revert to a system with the strongest chief of staff since H.R. Haldeman and Sherman Adams. Regan's control over the Reagan White House might even exceed that of these two strong predecessors.

The Holy Grail of “True” Cabinet Government

Every president since Lyndon Johnson has come to office promising to give his cabinet a large voice in the running of the government. President Nixon began his administration by giving his department secretaries broad leeway in personnel and policy, but ended up drawing tight control into the White House. President Ford promised to abandon the domination by a strong White House staff and guaranteed personal access to his cabinet secretaries. President Carter promised true cabinet government, but in the end felt he had given away too much power to the cabinet and tried to take it back in the summer of 1979. President Reagan promised cabinet government and developed a system of cabinet councils that was used in innovative ways to coordinate administration policy.³⁴

There is a major tug of war in every administration (between the cabinet secretaries and the White House staff) over control of administration policy. There is no way to avoid a strong White House staff in the modern presidency; the challenge is to see that it does not overwhelm the legitimate prerogatives of the cabinet.

The model of Cabinet Government that recent presidents hark back to is the Eisenhower administration, not that all agree with all aspects of his approach; but Eisenhower's cabinet played a significant role in his administration without major conflicts with the White House. This section will examine the dynamics of the cabinet—White House interaction in recent presidencies. It will begin first with an analysis of the centrifugal forces that operate on cabinet members that are the constant concern of White House aides.

Cabinet selection processes and criteria guarantee that members will not be chosen only for their personal and ideological loyalty to the president. Other factors tend to dominate cabinet choices, such as partisan concerns, symbolic statements, expertise, management experience, and clientele concerns. Thus the way members of a cabinet are chosen leads us to expect that they will not always see eye to eye with the White House. And once in office there are also strong centrifugal forces at work pulling the cabinet secretary away from the president. These forces include the cabinet secretary's duties to the law and to Congress and their dependency on their career bureaucracies and the constituencies their departments represent.

First of all, cabinet secretaries have duty to carry out the laws affecting their departments. The duties of cabinet secretaries are spelled out in the legislation that creates the department and its major programs. These laws are often contradictory, and they may be interpreted to be in conflict with what the president wants in any given situation.³⁵

Cabinet members are also pulled from the president by their obligations to the Congress. While the President has a major impact on legislation, Congress has the final say on the details of laws; and when there is a legal dispute about the meaning of a law, the issue is settled by determining “congressional intent.” Congress also has the final say on the budget levels for departments and programs within them.

There is also a natural division between the interests of the President and his cabinet appointees because of the nature of their jobs. They are chosen to head departments because they believe in the importance of its mission. They thus have a stake

in the organizational means to accomplish its mission, i.e., their organizational and jurisdictional turf. In order to do thier jobs well they must defend their turf against threats, even if the threats sometimes come from the White House. In these squabbles the White House is part of “them” not “us.”

This problem came up when the Nixon administration moved to place Nixon loyalists in the departments in order to assure White House control. One of those responsible for the placements said: “For the guy to be worth controlling, he has to know what is going on in his department. If he knows what’s going on there, he’s less likely to be amenable to central control.”³⁶ For a person to be able to be of use to the White House, he must also be trusted and accepted as a defender of the values represented by the agency and its mission. Because the White House must sometimes make decisions affecting the division of mission with other agencies, it is sometimes seen as a threat to the agency.

Since executive branch agencies depend on clientele groups to make their case before Congress in support of authority and appropriations, interest groups see agencies as their advocates in the government. Cabinet officers see it as part of their duty to maintain friendly liaison with major interests groups so that they can be mobilized to support presidential initiatives when needed. But at the same time they feel that they need to keep some distance. One Cabinet officer put it this way: “It may be too strong a statement to say that they regarded us as their advocate. They regarded us as their door. . . . I would say we were more the doorway in rather than the real advocate; if persuaded we would be the advocate. And we certainly impacted them with all of our policies so that they were a part of the process.”³⁷

The point of all of this is that managing the Cabinet in the U.S. system is a particularly thorny problem for the presidency. On the one hand cabinet members owe their allegiance to the President who appointed them and who can remove them at his pleasure. But on the other hand cabinet members have constitutional duties to the law and to Congress as well as dependencies on the career bureaucracy and their clientele groups. It must be stressed that these non presidential pulls are legitimate claims on the allegiance of cabinet members. Presidents should be able to expect loyalty from their cabinet members, but to expect the sort of rigid, literal obedience that the Nixon administration came to expect is asking too much from the American separation of powers system and is not in the best interests of the presidency. Presidents should realize that they are acting in a system of shared powers, not a unitary state with an executive structure of monocratic hierarchy.

The Eisenhower Cabinet Model

When Eisenhower was elected to the Presidency he came to office with strong ideas about the way it should be organized that stemmed from his military experience and previous contact with the White House. “For years I had been in frequent contact in the executive office of the White House, and I had certain ideas about the system, or lack of system, under which it operated. With my training in problems involving organization it was inconceivable to me that the work of the White House could not be better systemized than had been the case in the years I observed

it.”³⁸ He was also critical of the use to which previous presidents put their cabinet meetings. So Eisenhower resolved to organize his presidency much more formally than had his two immediate predecessors. He did this through his formal staff system tightly run by Sherman Adams and through the use of his cabinet and the cabinet secretariat.

One aspect of Eisenhower’s ability to use his cabinet effectively was his choice of personnel, who were mostly successful business men (“eight millionaires and a plumber”).³⁹ He felt that the interpersonal aspects of teamwork were important: “In organizing teams, personality is equally important with ability . . . Leadership is as vital in conference as it is in battle.”⁴⁰ His initial concerns with putting together the right combination of personalities resulted in a cabinet with relatively little of the backbiting, conflicts or leaks that have marked more recent administrations. Eisenhower used his cabinet by delegating as much as possible to his cabinet secretaries and by using the collective cabinet as a deliberative, though not a decision making, body.

Eisenhower felt that many decisions were not presidential, and he wanted as many of these as possible made by cabinet members and not brought into the White House. This had the effect of insulating the President from the details of managing the government and may have contributed to the public image that he was detached from his administration. Much of this was deliberate and the result of a conscious effort to create buffer zones around the president.⁴¹ The main buffer was, of course, Sherman Adams who carefully screened all business going to the Oval Office, including most cabinet members’ access to the President. He also spent much time trying to get cabinet members to settle interagency disputes before issues went to the President. “I always tried to resolve specific differences on a variety of problems before the issue had to be submitted to the President. Sometimes several meetings were necessary before an agreement was reached. But with a few exceptions I was successful.” Sometimes he would have to “point out, with emphasis, that a resourceful department head should be able to find an answer himself without expecting the President to find it for him.”⁴²

While Eisenhower delegated as much as possible to his cabinet secretaries individually, he wanted to use the cabinet collectively as a deliberative body. As he told his newly selected cabinet before he took office, “My hope will be to make this a policy body, to bring before you and for you to bring up subjects that are worthy of this body as a whole.”⁴³ But the cabinet was not meant to be a decision making body, and Eisenhower did not take votes on issues. In fact many issues had already been decided by the time they were brought before the Cabinet.⁴⁴

Cabinet meetings were relatively formal, with fixed agendas and focussed discussions and follow through. Much of the organization of the Cabinet meetings was due to Eisenhower’s introduction of the Cabinet Secretariat in 1954. The function of the Cabinet Secretariat, as described by Bradley Patterson who was a member of it, was to circulate cabinet papers prepared by the departments so that they could be considered by members before the meetings and to assure that important matters were included on the agenda. This was not always easy since cabinet members did not necessarily want to air their problems in front of the whole cabinet. “The Cabinet Secretary had to dig, wheedle, persuade and finesse Cabinet members to bring to the common table what were clearly common matters, but which the department heads,

in their century-and-a-half-long tradition, would much prefer to bring privately to the Oval Office. It was only because they knew that Eisenhower wanted it this way and no other that they reluctantly acceded to the Cabinet Secretary's or Sherman Adams' agenda-planning."⁴⁵

The Eisenhower model of cabinet government is the standard against which future presidents would measure their intentions for the presidency. Kennedy and Johnson consciously reacted against what they thought was a too rigid system. Nixon and Carter, however, both promised delegation and consultation with their cabinets, but were unable to avoid major conflicts between their cabinets and White House staffs. Reagan promised cabinet government and instituted a system of cabinet councils, an alternative to the Eisenhower model.

Kennedy and Johnson

Just as President Kennedy rejected the Sherman Adams model of White House organization, so he also rejected the Eisenhower model of cabinet organization. Both of these moves were urged on Kennedy by Clark Clifford early after the election. Clifford advised Kennedy to reject the Eisenhower model and characterized it with a bit of overstatement: "Apparently President Eisenhower considered the Cabinet to be in the nature of a corporate Board of Directors. Decisions would be made by the Cabinet and he would carry them out. This is contrary to every basic concept of the Presidency and should be junked. Cabinet meetings were attended by 30 to 40 persons, and as a result were sterile and time consuming."⁴⁶

Richard Neustadt argued against the Eisenhower practice of delegation to cabinet secretaries. In an early transition memorandum he argued that Kennedy ought to ensure that disagreements within the administration be brought to the presidential level for decision by appointing strong cabinet members with conflicting views on public policy. "If the President-elect wants both 'conservative' and 'liberal' advice on economic management, for example, and wants the competition to come out where he can see it and judge it, he needs to choose strong-minded competitors and *he needs to put them in positions of roughly equal institutional power*, so that neither wins the contest at a bureaucratic level too far down for the President to judge it."⁴⁷

While Eisenhower used organizational channels to delegate and keep decisions out of the White House, Kennedy followed Neustadt's advice and drew matters into the White House so that he and his staff could be actively involved in governmental decisions.⁴⁸ He felt the presidency ought to be "the vital center of action in our whole scheme of government . . . the President *must* place himself in the very thick of the fight."⁴⁹

In line with Kennedy's desire to be personally in charge of the government rather than presiding over the institutions of government, he held few cabinet meetings, preferring to deal with his departmental secretaries one at a time. Kennedy felt "Cabinet meetings are simply useless. Why should the Postmaster General sit there and listen to a discussion of the problems of Laos?"⁵⁰

Lyndon Johnson, like Kennedy, ran the government from the White House, relying on his White House staff. He held cabinet meetings more regularly than Kennedy,

but used them as briefing forums rather than as consultative mechanisms. Toward the end of his administration he relied increasingly on those involved with his national security decision making process, and became distrustful of those outside his immediate circle. As he told President-elect Nixon when they met at the White House in December 1968: "Let me tell you, Dick, I would have been a damn fool to have discussed major decisions with the full Cabinet present, because I knew that if I said something in the morning, you could sure as hell bet it would appear in the afternoon papers."⁵¹

The Nixon Administration

Richard Nixon began his administration with the intention of reversing the personalized White House control of the government that had developed in the Kennedy-Johnson years and returning to a cabinet centered government. He intended to concentrate his efforts as president on foreign affairs and delegate domestic policy to his cabinet. "I've always thought this country could run itself domestically without a President. All you need is a competent cabinet to run the country at home. You need a president for foreign policy. . . ." ⁵²

At a meeting of his newly designated cabinet members the day after he presented them on television he extorted them to seize control of their departments and not cave in to the bureaucrats. It sounded as if he intended to let them run their departments with a minimum of White House interference.⁵³ At one of the first cabinet meetings in 1969 he delegated to his Cabinet secretaries authority to choose their own subordinates based on the criteria of ability first and loyalty second.⁵⁴ In the beginning he had the general notion that the Cabinet would serve a collegial and advisory function, but soon changed to view secretaries primarily as managers of their departments.⁵⁵

According to John Ehrlichman, Nixon was either quite optimistic or naive. But disillusionment soon set in. Nixon believed "all these wonderful guys would help him and all he would do is take the 'big plays.' But it doesn't work that way. The news summary comes in and Wally Hickle has been putting his foot in his mouth. You can't give these guys carte blanche."⁵⁶ After only a few weeks into the administration Nixon began to reverse his earlier stance on delegation and give orders to his cabinet secretaries through his White House staff.

The main driving force behind Nixon's concern with his Cabinet's behavior was his reelection. "As time passed, it appeared that whenever discretion was granted to the Secretaries they failed to do things the way Richard Nixon wanted them done. Since Nixon was the one who had to go back to the people after four years, to explain why things had gone as they did, he reacted to their 'failures' by retaining almost all of the discretion. . . . If he had to pay the political price for his Cabinet Secretaries' mistakes, then he, by God, had the right and obligation to correct those mistakes."⁵⁷ Nixon also came to view cabinet meetings as virtually useless.

If Nixon was disappointed in his cabinet, the feeling was often mutual. Members of the Cabinet often felt that they did not have enough direct access to the President and that he was overly insulated by his White House staff. Some of them complained, even publicly, of their lack of access. They included Secretary of Transportation John

Volpe, Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickle, and Budget Director Mayo. According to Jeb Stuart Magruder, they were not all wrong.

From our perspective in the White House, the cabinet officials were useful spokesmen when we wanted to push a particular line—on Cambodia, on Carswell, or whatever. From their perspective, however, it was often a rude awakening to have Jeb Magruder or Chuck Colson calling up and announcing, “Mr. Secretary, we’re sending over this speech that we’d like you to deliver.” But that was how it was. Virtually all the cabinet members had to accept that they lacked access to the president and that their dealings would be with Haldeman and his various minions.⁵⁸

Because of these factors there was constant friction between Cabinet members and the White House staff.

Given these developments and Nixon’s perception of them, he did three things to deal with the unacceptable situation: he relied more heavily on his White House staff, particularly H.R. Haldeman; he juggled his Cabinet to appoint members with greater loyalty to himself; and he attempted to reorganize the executive branch in order to make it more responsive to the President. After the 1972 election Nixon demanded resignations from all of his cabinet members. In his second term he chose cabinet members of whose loyalty he could be certain.

In addition to personnel changes, Nixon wanted to reorganize the government in a major way. Based on a report by the Ash Commission, he intended to replace the constituency oriented departments of Agriculture, Labor, Commerce, and Transportation with four goal oriented departments: Community Development, Natural Resources, Human Resources, and Economic Affairs.⁵⁹ In addition, he wanted to limit access to the President to five assistants and have three counsellors (for human resources, natural resources, and community development) report to them. The result of this would be to give the White House staff effective control over the whole government and limit the Cabinet secretaries to a ministerial role with no direct access to the President. By this time, however, the Watergate revelations were beginning to break, and the plan was abandoned.

President Nixon’s early intentions to use his Cabinet as a collegial body and to delegate much of the management of the government to them while he reserved himself for the “big plays” foundered. After failures to achieve his domestic agenda and being frustrated by a Democratic Congress, he resorted to the tools of the administrative presidency to achieve his goals.⁶⁰ He impounded unprecedented amounts of funds that had been provided for domestic programs by law.⁶¹ He took military actions in Southeast Asia without consulting or informing Congress. He tried to undermine the Civil Service System by use of political clearances and the placing of Nixon loyalists throughout the career bureaucracy.⁶² And he tried to reorganize the executive branch by making its upper levels subordinate to a super-cabinet of White House aides as described above.

Nixon and his aides saw the Executive branch as a hierarchy akin to the military with the President as Commander in Chief; violations of the chain of command were

intolerable. They saw other opposing forces in the governmental system as illegitimate. Congressional opposition was seen as obstructionist. Cabinet officials' responsiveness to interest groups and their agencies were seen as undermining the President.

While Presidents have a right to expect loyalty from their appointees in the executive branch, they must also realize that compelling pressures from clientele groups and the career bureaucracy are inevitable, and that many of the attempts to affect governmental policy by the Congress are legitimate. Presidents have the right and duty to resist these pressures with all of the legitimate, constitutional means at their disposal (and these are considerable); but they ought not to be so frustrated by their inevitable defeats that they resort to illegitimate means to enforce their prerogatives.

President Ford took office with the intention of ridding the country of the Watergate specter and organized his administration to provide a sharp contrast with the Nixon administration. While he was not successful in running the White House without a chief of staff, he was able to return collegiality to the cabinet. He was always accessible to Cabinet members. According to Richard Cheney "Nobody ever screens out a cabinet member. The president will always be told so and so wants to see him."⁶³ Despite Ford's accessibility and his reactivation of the Cabinet as a deliberative body, his administration did experience conflict between the Cabinet and his White House staff. But the problems were not as great as the ones that plagued the Nixon or the Carter presidencies. The Ford administration created the Economic Policy Board, a Cabinet and White House staff standing committee that operated as the central forum for the administration's foreign and domestic economic policy. It met over 500 times during the Ford administration and was one of the most systematic advisory structures created in the White House to advise the President in a broad area of domestic policy. The EPB was to serve as a model for the Cabinet Council system developed by the Reagan administration. Its executive secretary, Roger Porter, was brought into the Reagan administration to help install it.⁶⁴

Jimmy Carter's Cabinet Government

Jimmy Carter's vision for his presidency was formed in reaction against what he saw as the abuses of the Nixon administration. Carter would have no chief of staff, and he would rely heavily on his Cabinet and remain accessible to them. In meetings with his newly designated Cabinet members in Georgia during the Christmas holidays in 1976 Carter told them he wanted to "restore the Cabinet to its proper role as the President's first circle of advisors" and that there would be "no all-powerful palace guard in my White House, no anonymous aides, unelected, unknown to the public, and unconfirmed by the Senate, wielding vast power from the White House basement."⁶⁵ Carter wanted to be his own chief of staff on the Kennedy and Roosevelt model and refused to designate a chief of staff. He would be the hub at the center of the wheel and all White House staff members would report to him.

His Cabinet would also advise him and have access to him. "I believe in Cabinet administration of our government. There will never be an instance while I am President when the members of the White House Staff dominate or act in a superior position to the members of our Cabinet."⁶⁶ He, as Nixon before him, initially intended

to delegate much of domestic policy making to his cabinet. Hamilton Jordan, his principle advisor, said: "The problem is too many presidents have tried to deal with all of the problems of the country from the White House. The first line of offense or defense is the Cabinet. That's where the problems should be dealt with, in the departments and agencies. You can't do it all from the White House."⁶⁷

This principle of delegation was put into effect early when Carter let his cabinet appointees choose their own subordinates on the theory that they should be able to put together their own management teams. While this pleased cabinet members, it was objected to by some of his White House staff, and particularly by members of Congress who wanted to have patronage appointments made. They had supported Carter during the campaign and the transition and were owed some favors. But when they called the White House they were told to talk to the departmental secretaries upon whom they had much less claim.

Carter's early Cabinet meetings were useful as an introduction of the new members to each other and as a means of getting information out. Each secretary would be asked to report on the past week and what would likely come up the next week in their areas of responsibility. But after a year or so of this type of meeting, often without an agenda, attendees began to tire of them. Hamilton Jordan felt they were a waste of time.⁶⁸ One Cabinet member said the meetings "were tedious, boring and virtually a waste of time."⁶⁹ At a Cabinet meeting at Camp David Juanita Kreps said, "The Cabinet meetings are fairly useless."⁷⁰ The meetings were not used for decision making, and tough problems were discussed in smaller meetings with the President.⁷¹

The tension and friction between the Carter White House and Cabinet came to a head in the spring and summer of 1979 when Carter decided that something had to be done. The White House staff felt there was no discipline in the administration and that Carter had to take charge forcefully. The experiment with cabinet government and spokes of the wheel organization had not worked.

To respond to concerns about the conduct of his administration, Carter went to Camp David in July 1979 to consult with advisors and prominent people from around the country. When he came back he had decided to name Hamilton Jordan to be chief of staff. He told the cabinet at a meeting that they were not working for him but for themselves and that he was going to make some changes. He demanded written resignations from each member of the Cabinet. Despite objections that this would seem too much like President Nixon's demand for resignations in 1972, he went forward with it and told cabinet members to fill out evaluation forms on their immediate subordinates to evaluate their loyalty to the administration. The resignations were dutifully turned in and Carter accepted five of them.

Reagan's Cabinet Councils

Ronald Reagan came to office with a remarkably coherent agenda and set of policy priorities. His priorities to significantly increase defense spending and cut spending in virtually all domestic policy areas lent themselves to a narrow focus and simple set of values for his administration. This simple set of priorities served as a litmus test and guide to action that was a great help in recruiting personnel for the

administration. Personal and ideological loyalty were the primary criteria for appointees.⁷² The coherence of values led to an administration with much more unity than has marked recent administrations with more disparate policy agendas and personnel.

Reagan also came to office with the notion that he wanted his administration to be run through some form of "cabinet government." Delegating significant authority to the Cabinet fit well into his style of leadership and was consciously different from President Carter's tendency to become embroiled in the details of decisions. What was not intended for a Reagan approach to cabinet government, however, was delegation to cabinet secretaries of authority over their budgets or selection of personnel.

Initial budget decisions were made by the White House staff and David Stockman. Except for defense, the budgets included significant cuts in most agencies, and newly designated cabinet members were brought into the White House to sign off on the proposed cuts. They were called to a meeting with Stockman, the President, and several White House aides and given a chance to react to the proposed cuts, but it was difficult because "they're in the position of having to argue against the group line. And the group line is cut, cut, cut," according to David Stockman's account.⁷³ The newly designated secretaries were at an added disadvantage because they did not have their management teams together yet and had not yet had a chance to get to know their career executives.

The Reagan White House felt that Carter and Nixon had lost the personnel battle to their Cabinet Secretaries and worked hard to keep tight control of subcabinet appointments in the White House. They were successful, and the Reagan administration kept closer control of administration personnel in the White House than any other recent administration. The slowness of the appointments process resulted in many delays in appointing the subcabinet. This put the new secretaries at an added disadvantage in disagreeing with the White House staff if they had wanted to.

The new White House staff very consciously and systematically used the transition period to impress on the administration the importance of the central agenda. In addition, the early agenda of the administration was dominated by the economic priorities of the budget and tax cuts. These were engineered by David Stockman, James Baker, and the Legislative Strategy Group. According to one participant: "So, the early cabinet meetings were Stockman, on behalf of the president, and the other presidential advisers just laying out, 'Here's what we're going to do fellows, and I expect you to support it'. . . . The cabinet met often . . . but just to receive their marching orders and to hype each other up."⁷⁴

Given this tight White House control of the budget, personnel, and the legislative agenda; how could the Reagan system be considered "cabinet government"? Edwin Meese explained that the "cabinet concept" intended that cabinet members would be the President's principle advisors and that they would not be undercut by other members of the White House staff. He further explained that President Reagan had an eighteen member cabinet: the heads of major departments as well as Meese as counselor to the President, the directors of OMB and CIA, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. representative to the United Nations.⁷⁵

Meese explained that no major administration decision was made without at least

one member of the cabinet present, and this ensured that the President would have input from the cabinet. This is an expansive concept of cabinet government that corresponded with Reagan's expanded cabinet membership. But the tight Reagan White House control of administration policy and its legislative agenda was a far cry from previous attempts at "cabinet government," whether Eisenhower's, Nixon's (first term), or Carter's.

During the transition period and early days of the administration Alexander Haig began to suspect signs of White House domination of the Cabinet. When the Cabinet-designates met on January 7 Edwin Meese dominated the meeting, giving a primer on the president's ideas, procedures, and priorities, while Reagan sat passively.⁷⁶ Haig recalls that he had "the distinct feeling that Ed Meese and his colleagues perceived their rank in the Administration as being superior to that of any member of the Cabinet."⁷⁷ At the first Cabinet meeting Meese and Baker were sitting at the Cabinet table in sharp contrast with previous practice. Haig wrote in his notes of that meeting: "Government by Cabinet or troika?"⁷⁸

The other part of President Reagan's approach to cabinet government was the cabinet council system. It was modeled on President Ford's experience with the Economic Policy Board, the first effective standing cabinet committee in the domestic area. Roger Porter, who had written a book on his experience with the EPB was brought in from the Treasury Department to help put together the cabinet council system and to be executive secretary of the Cabinet Council on Economic Affairs.⁷⁹

The creation of the Cabinet Councils was announced by the White House on February 26, 1981 with five councils: Economic Affairs (CCEA), Commerce and Trade (CCCT), Human Resources (CCHR), Natural Resources and Environment (CCNRE), and Food and Agriculture (CCFA).⁸⁰ The following year the Cabinet Council on Legal Policy (CCLP) and Cabinet Council on Management and Administration (CCMA) were added. The purpose of the councils according to the White House was to act as a "means for deliberate consideration of major policy issues which affect the interests of more than one department or agency."⁸¹

The purpose of the Cabinet Council approach was to provide a forum for cabinet participation and deliberation on issues that cut across cabinet jurisdictions but still not include secretaries whose jurisdictions had nothing to do with the policies being considered. It also was to provide for interaction and integration of Cabinet views with those of the White House staff and avoid the strains that had marked so many earlier administrations. The system would also allow second level policy issues to be dealt with below the presidential level and it would help keep the focus of the administration on the central Reagan agenda. The cabinet councils were to be the focus of a policy network that integrated both Cabinet and White House resources and input.⁸²

The Cabinet Councils were all formally chaired by the President with a designated Cabinet level chairman pro tempore and six to eleven members, with meetings open to all Cabinet members. Council activities were coordinated by the Office of Policy Development and the Office of Cabinet Affairs and were supported by executive secretariats, and functioned with interdepartmental working groups. The Councils were active to varying degrees, with the most active being the CCEA which met

100 times in the first 15 months, with the next busiest being the CCCT and CCNR which met 31 times each. The least active was the CCLP which met only three times.⁸³ The President attended about 15% of the meetings and the councils often initiated issues to consider, not waiting for Presidential initiation.⁸⁴ The meetings were held in the Roosevelt Room, across from the Oval Office. By the fall of 1983 two of the Councils were dormant: CCNRE and CCFA, while the CCHR and CCLR were marginally active. The others were consistently active with the CCEA being extremely busy. Thus the councils were active and successful to widely varying degrees.

During the first term of the Reagan administration the cabinet council system worked well as a means of getting cabinet and White House input and developing issue analysis in an orderly way, though as has been pointed out, the councils themselves enjoyed varying success. Such a cabinet council system entails certain prerequisites for it to accomplish its coordinating goals.⁸⁵ First of all, there has to be a commitment by the White House and the Cabinet to play by the rules; the main rule being that issues are not to be brought up to the President on a bilateral basis, but that all issues are to be "roundtabled" by discussing them at a cabinet council meeting. Each cabinet member's policy proposals are to be subjected to the scrutiny and criticism of peers in the cabinet and White House staff.

Thus the White House staff might have to guard the President from being lobbied unilaterally by a cabinet member. Of course, this will be perceived by the cabinet member as the White House staff barring cabinet members from access to the president. Secondly, the President must reject attempts by cabinet members to induce him to make decisions outside of the structure. If all members of the cabinet have confidence in the integrity of the process, they will be less likely to try to end run it by going to the president privately. This type of process will only work in an atmosphere of reasonable mutual trust which marked the first term Reagan cabinet (with the exception of Alexander Haig). It is hard to imagine how it might have been able to work in other administrations that suffered backbiting and competition among cabinet members and the White House staff.

But the system is not without its problems. Alexander Haig criticized it because he argued that it led to domination by the White House staff. Haig felt that he was denied access to the President by the White House staff and that the staff had too much anonymous and unscrutinized power.

But to me the White House was as mysterious as a ghost ship; you heard the creak of the rigging and the groan of the timbers and sometimes even glimpsed the crew on deck. But which of the crew had the helm? Was it Meese, was it Baker, was it someone else? It was impossible to know for sure.⁸⁶

Early in Reagan's second term all of the cabinet councils were eliminated except one on economic policy and one on domestic policy. The president would thus receive policy advice primarily from these two councils and the National Security Council. The two new councils would be chaired by officials playing two roles. James Baker would chair the council on economic affairs while he was Treasury Secretary, and Edwin

Meese would chair the domestic council along with carrying out his duties as Attorney General.

Conclusion: What Have We Learned?

No one questions the need for an active White House staff in the modern presidency. Cabinet members may complain, and certain staffers may abuse their power, but the president cannot operate without a staff to protect his political interests and keep the administration's focus on the central agenda. Stuart Eizenstat argues that departments and agencies are inherently incapable of coordinating themselves. "Agencies simply do not trust each other. . . . This lack of trust means that, when we have to deal with cross-cutting, conflicting, complex issues of the day that involve more than one agency, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to entrust to one agency the responsibility to coordinate the development of policy that affects several agencies. . . . Without a centralized, strong, and effective White House staff, it is simply impossible to assure the neutrality of the policymaking process because agencies bring their own biases to the process. . . . Due process cannot occur without a strong centralized White House staff."⁸⁷

Bradley Patterson, from his years of experience in the White House, argues that a strong White House staff is necessary in order to perform the following crucial functions for the President:

1. The interrogation/orchestration/moderator function on crosscutting policy issues.
2. The personal policy development function on issues especially sensitive of the President.
3. The ferret task: of receiving and judging informal, anticipatory information on problems about which Cabinet officers are embarrassed or reluctant.
4. Selective intervention where policy changes or crises make necessary a White House monitorship even of operational details. Patterson argues that these are functions unique to a White House staff and that no cabinet officer would be able to perform these functions and those of heading a cabinet agency.⁸⁸

But a strong White House staff is not without its dangers. There will inevitably be complaints from the Cabinet and others that the White House staff is isolating the President and limiting their access to him. This will be so even though it will often be the President's personal decision not to see a cabinet member. There will also be criticisms of the White House staff that are intended for the President. Of course, the function of lightning rod is an important one for the staff in any White House. The other danger is that the President may come to depend too heavily on his staff and limit his sources of information. This may have happened in the Johnson and Nixon presidencies when the wagons were circled because of the Vietnam War and Watergate, respectively. Bowman Cutter argues that a president should keep his staff off balance by not letting them get too confident of their positions in the White House.⁸⁹ But this can be carried to extremes as it sometimes was by Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

There is also a developing consensus that in the White House staff someone must unequivocally be in charge. In the words of one Kennedy aide: "Everybody believes

in democracy until he gets to the White House and then you begin to believe in dictatorship, because it's so hard to get things done."⁹⁰ On this issue was have the informed opinions of H.R. Haldeman, Richard Cheney, and Jack Watson. Each of them has concluded that if the President does not designate someone to control the rivalries and competition for the President's ear, chaos will result. The Reagan experience, with its troika of differentiated jurisdictions, has brought into question whether there must be one person in charge, but during the first term there were complaints from within the administration about the lack of clear leadership.

It is still possible that a President may be elected with the skills and intelligence of a Franklin Roosevelt or a John Kennedy who can act as the hub of the wheel and be his own chief of staff. But experience in the Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidencies has brought into question whether we can return to the less formal days of the 1930s or even 1960s. The consequences of failing to pull it off (Ford and Carter) are apparent and present a serious risk for any president who tries it.

But the president must be careful in choosing his chief of staff and other top White House aides. It may be useful to consider Michael Medved's set of lessons for White House assistants that he gleaned from his study of Presidents' chief aides over the past century:

1. A President should select as his principal aide a man whose goals and experience involve more than the service of a single politician.
2. Presidential assistants must do everything in their power to escape publicity.
3. Emotional dependence by a President on his top aide should be avoided as far as possible.
4. The emergence of a central figure on the staff—whether he is called White House Secretary, Staff Coordinator, Assistant President, or Chief of Staff—is necessary for the efficient functioning of the White House.⁹¹

With respect to the cabinet, presidential experience over the past several decades has taught us some lessons. We know that there will inevitably be conflicts between the Cabinet and the White House staff; it is inherent in their differing functions. The trick is to make the interface into a dynamic tension rather than letting it degenerate into a destructive hostility. This can be done by a recognition on each side of the legitimate functions of the other side. It is particularly important the White House recognize that the legitimate, constitutional roles of Cabinet members along with profound political pressures give them perspectives not always in line with those of the White House. As the Carter Presidency taught us, legitimate pressures must be used to extract loyalty and coherence from the cabinet. But as the Nixon Presidency demonstrates, expecting a rigid discipline and subordination to the White House is both unrealistic and harmful.

One lesson learned is that it is helpful to move quickly with the major priorities of the administration. One of Nixon's top policy aides argued:

Everything depends on what you do in program formulation during the first six or seven months. I have watched three presidencies and I am increasingly convinced of that. Time goes by so fast. During the first six months or so, the White House staff is not hated by the cabinet, there is a period of friendship and cooper-

ation and excitement. There is some animal energy going for you in those first six to eight months, especially if people perceive things in the same light. If that exists and so long as that exists you can get a lot done. You only have a year at the most for new initiatives, a time when you can establish some programs as your own, in contrast to what has gone on before. After that, after priorities are set, and after a president finds he doesn't have to talk with cabinet members, that's when the problems set in, and the White House aides close off access to cabinet members and others.⁹²

There are certain things a newly elected President can do in order to establish cordial relations between the Cabinet and White House staff. They have to do with personnel, early actions and meetings, and organizational structures. With respect to personnel the President-elect can recruit cabinet members who can get along with each other and will not be threatened by the White House staff. Eisenhower consciously tried to do this and largely succeeded. In most presidencies, however, cabinet choices are based upon a complex of factors, and personal compatibility is often a minor consideration.

But the President does have some control over the agenda of the initial days of his transition and administration. One of the lessons learned is that it helps to set the ground rules early. Bowman Cutter who played an important role in the Carter administration, argues that the President should have a "set speech" to give to every new Cabinet member. This speech should spell out the role that Cabinet members are expected to play with respect to the White House staff, OMB, and any important issues the administration is expected to be faced with. He argues that this is hard because after the election victory everyone is in a state of euphoria and any critical thinking about organization is apt to be lost. Lack of clarity of role and jurisdiction leads to turf battles that are wasteful and divisive.⁹³ John Ehrlichman argues that the ground rules must be set before the cabinet members gets settled in the new post, because trying to get power back once it is perceived to be delegated is "like pulling teeth." It is also crucial that the President sit in on the meetings personally to let the cabinet members know it is coming from him and not merely the White House staff.⁹⁴

The Reagan administration learned this lesson well and clearly set out the expectations of the White House for Cabinet members with respect to budget and personnel matters. This was one of the reasons that the Reagan administration was less troubled by the Cabinet conflicts than some other recent administrations. On the other hand the communication might be handled in a less intimidating manner than the meetings of new cabinet members with the Reagan White House.

Early Cabinet meetings are also important so that members get acquainted with each other and take each other's measure. These meetings are useful for distributing information, letting people know what the party line is, and for developing a team spirit. They are particularly important for keeping the focus on the central agenda and encouraging new cabinet members to keep the White House perspective in mind. Thus it is useful to have cabinet meetings often early in the administration. Later

it is harder to keep people's attention, and they feel they have too many important things to do to listen to issues of secondary importance.

The third thing new administrations can do is to set up some kind of structure to facilitate the implementation of the President's agenda without causing a rift between cabinet and White House staff. There are several precedents here. The first is the Eisenhower model of using cabinet meetings as deliberative sessions, but few Presidents since then have been successful to the extent that he was in this. A second approach, also established by Eisenhower, is the establishment of a Cabinet Secretariat that ensures that all issues are staffed out with input from any department that has a legitimate stake in the issue. The secretariat can also be used to ensure that any presidential decisions are implemented.

The cabinet council system is an alternative structure for managing relations and trying to prevent a gap from growing between the Cabinet and the staff. With Ford's Economic Policy Board as a model the Reagan administration has made such a system work reasonably well, though in only some issue areas. It is, however, possible that some President will be elected who has the charisma, intelligence, and judgement to ignore all of these organizational approaches. Until that time, however, we can still learn a lot from the lessons of recent presidencies.⁹⁵

Notes

1. The author would like to thank Alana Northrop for comments on an earlier version of this article and Colin Campbell for permission to quote from his forthcoming book: *In Search of Executive Harmony*.
2. Interview with John Ehrlichman, Santa Fe, New Mexico, June 3, 1983.
3. Interview with H.R. Haldeman, Los Angeles, California, May 25, 1983.
4. Comment on "Presidential Management" by Richard E. Neustadt in *Improving the Accountability and Performance of Government* edited by Bruce L.R. Smith and James D. Carroll (Washington: Brookings, 1982), p. 109.
5. "The Buck Still Stops at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue," *The Washingtonian* (December 1980), p. 205.
6. Patrick Anderson, *The President's Men* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1969), p. 469.
7. Bradley Patterson, "The Buck Still Stops at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue," *The Washingtonian* (December 1980), p. 206.
8. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 114.
9. Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report* (New York: Popular Library, 1961), p. 57.
10. Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 139.
11. Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 147.
12. Memorandum on Staffing *The President-Elect*, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, October 30, 1960, p. 3-4. See also Attachment A, Roosevelt's Approach to Staffing the White House.
13. Interview with Clark Clifford, Washington, D.C. July 15, 1983.
14. Clark Clifford, Memorandum on Transition, November 9, 1960, Kennedy Library.
15. Jack Valenti, "Life's Never the same After the White House Power Trip," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (March 19, 1984), p. 21.
16. Patrick Anderson, *The President's Men* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 299.
17. Quoted by Francis Rourke, "The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: Strategic Alternatives," in *The Presidency and the Political System* edited by Michael Nelson (Washington: CQ Press, 1984), p. 347.
18. Interview with H.R. Haldeman, Los Angeles, May 25, 1983.

19. Interview with H.R. Haldeman, Los Angeles, May 25, 1983.
20. Quoted in Richard Pious, *The American Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 244.
21. Michael Medved, *The Shadow Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1979), p. 320. See also William Safire, *Before the Fall* (New York: Balantine Books, 1977), p. 366.
22. See the analysis of R. Gordon Hoxie, "Staffing the Ford and Carter Presidencies: in Bradley D. Nash, et al, *Organizing and Staffing the Presidency* (New York: Center for the Study of the Presidency, 1980), p. 44.
23. Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper and Row and Reader's Digest Association, 1979), p. 147.
24. Ibid.
25. Quoted by Stephen Wayne, *The Legislative Presidency* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 52.
26. Interview with Richard Cheney, Washington, D.C., August 1, 1983.
27. Interview with Richard Cheney, Washington, D.C., August 1, 1983.
28. Dom Bonafede, "Carter White House is Heavy on Functions, Light on Frills," *National Journal* (February 12, 1977), p. 234.
29. Interview with Jack Watson, Atlanta, June 17, 1983; and interview with Stuart Eizenstat July 15, 1983, Washington, D.C.
30. See the discussion by Colin Campbell, *In Search of Executive Harmony* (forthcoming) Chapter 4.
31. Lawrence Barrett, *Gambling With History* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 76–77.
32. For discussions of Deaver's role, see "Making Reagan be Reagan" *Time Magazine* (August 27, 1984), p. 21. See also *The Washingtonian* (October 1984), p. 156.
33. "The New White House Buzzword—Burnout" *Los Angeles Times* (December 19, 1983), p. 1,8.
34. For an overview of the development of the U.S. cabinet from the beginning of the Republic and an annotated bibliography see R. Gordon Hoxie, "The Cabinet in the American Presidency, 1789–1984," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Spring 1984), p. 209. See also, Hoxie, ed., *The White House: Organization and Operations* (New York: Center for the Study of the Presidency, 1971).
35. For examples of laws affecting cabinet officers and ways in which they can give contradictory mandates see Bradley Patterson, *The President's Cabinet* (Washington: ASPA, 1976), p. 9–15.
36. Quoted by Hugh Heclo, *A Government of Strangers* (Washington: Brookings, 1979), p. 97.
37. Quoted by Roger Porter *Presidential Decision Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 13.
38. Quoted in Louis W. Koenig *The Chief Executive* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), p. 167).
39. "Washington Wire," *The New Republic* (December 15, 1952), p. 3. Quoted in Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*. p. 61.
40. Quoted in Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 119.
41. See Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington: Brookings, 1976), p. 65.
42. Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report* (New York: Popular Library, 1961), p. 57.
43. Quoted in Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 106.
44. Greenstein, p. 115.
45. Bradley Paterson, *The President's Cabinet* (Washington: ASPA, 1976.), p. 108.
46. "Memorandum on Transition" (November 9, 1960), p. 6.
47. Memorandum on "Organizing the Transition: A tentative Check-List for The Weeks Between Election and Inaugural" prepared by Richard E. Neustat, p. 11. Kennedy Library.
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