RESEARCH ARTICLE

PAR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW ASPA

Overcoming neutrality as an organizational learning impediment

Karen D. Sweeting [1] 🔘 | **Brittany "Brie" Haupt** [2] 🔘

[1]Department of Political Science, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, USA

[2]Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA

Correspondence
Karen D. Sweeting, Department of Political Science, University of Rhode Island, 80 Upper College Road, 206 Washburn Hall, Kingston, RI 02881, USA.
Email: ksweeting@uri.edu

Abstract

This article addresses the negative implications of neutrality in bureaucratic systems and public service. Neutrality employs a sameness approach that reinforces impartiality, invisibility, and indifference, resulting in what we term discriminatory blindness. After a brief illustrative review of neutrality in public service, we critique neutrality as an organizational impediment based on its veiled negative implications and disparate outcomes that fail to center the human experience and treat people based on how they are situated to ensure equity in outcomes. We propose a framework to forge ahead with eight actionable types of initiatives and learning constructs to raise the consciousness of public practitioners. We conclude with an action-oriented and learning-focused approach.

Evidence for practice

- Increased awareness and understanding of how public administrators are socialized to legitimize institutionalized biases.
- It can be challenging for public practitioners to recognize neutrality's adverse effects and outcomes. Focusing on actionable types of initiatives may allow those in public service to develop greater consciousness and be strategic in actual behavior, policies, practices, norms, mindsets, and value changes.
- We propose an action-oriented and learning-focused approach as an ethical responsibility for organizations and individuals to engage in viable strategies and tools with human-focused outcomes and interactions in practice and policy-making.

  If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

  The late Honorable Desmond Tutu

Contemporary public administration literature challenges the traditionalist perspective that views neutrality as altruistic. Neutrality focuses more on applying rules, policies, and procedures to given situations in a uniform and mechanized way that dehumanizes people, inhibits change, and fails to consider differentiated needs, disproportionate burdens, and disparate outcomes (Ford, 2022; Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Guy & Mastracci, 2018; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Moynihan et al., 2015; Portillo et al., 2020). Public professionals are called upon to promote neutrality in the execution and delivery of public services, and as bureaucrats, they are regarded as products of the system. They are socialized to adapt and enculturated to operate within the confines of the bureaucratic structure while simultaneously working to reinforce and legitimize the system as they act (Gooden, 2015; King &

Stivers, 1998). In this article, we argue that neutrality should be considered for what it is—a sacred cow (Kriegel & Brandt, 2008). Raising the consciousness of public professionals is critical to recognizing the harms of neutrality and effectively leading and managing an increasingly globalized, socially complex, and diverse public service (Lopez-Littleton & Blessett, 2015).

The negative implications of neutrality are typically "veiled," so few practitioners understand the overt disparities this practice generates. Neutrality can be tied to the distribution of services and disparities buried in organizations' policies, practices, and norms perpetuating inequitable outcomes for minoritized and marginalized populations. An example is the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s charges against Texas for discrimination in

the distribution of disaster recovery funds from Hurricane Harvey through scoring criteria that substantially disadvantaged and excluded Black and Latinx residents (HUD, 2022). The novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), pandemic exposed systemic and structural failures based on the disproportionate impact and fatalities within marginalized communities, vaccine distribution and access to public health, economic impact disparities, housing insecurity, disproportionate educational impacts with virtual learning, lack of access to food, and lack of equal response and recovery efforts within emergency management systems. Evidence of the systemic inability to break patterns of dysfunctional behavior includes injustices, such as police brutality on Black and Brown bodies (McCord, 2019). The murders of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor, and Daunte Wright are a few of many that highlight how some in law enforcement continue to use their shield to intensify violence and racial policing under the "fair" and "neutral" language of bureaucracy and discretion (Burnes, 1996; McCord, 2019).

Research shows that when interpreted and implemented, some regulations only apply to the "common people" (Stivers, 2015). Who are the common people? What does neutrality in public service look like? How do politics, administration, and bureaucratic government impact neutrality? We attempt to answer these questions in this research. The issue remains the rigidity of bureaucracy—finding the elusive balance between politics, administration, democracy, and bureaucracy to create more racially just, equitable, inclusive, and accessible public service systems (Portillo et al., 2020; Triantafillou, 2015).

This article illuminates aspects of neutrality and explores its illegitimate and fundamentally exploitative structural impediments that we can no longer justify or afford to ignore in public service. We highlight the adverse nature of neutrality and posit that the discipline of public administration remains imprisoned by its history, metaphors, traditions, impartiality, and indifference to stimulate greater consciousness of neutrality as an organizational learning impediment. This article focuses on the "veil" cast by neutrality to obscure the implications of neutral behaviors in treating everyone the same. The article concludes with a discussion of implications, a call to action, and ways to advance and strengthen organizational learning mechanisms to develop more meaningful and intentional culturally competent public service practices.

BELIEF IN BUREAUCRATIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE NEUTRALITY

Bureaucracy is a conceptual pillar of public administration with normative governing notions of precision, unambiguity, continuity, and with a focus on efficiency and legitimacy (Weber, 1978). Weber's (1978) bureaucratic model has five prominent structural elements: rationality and neutrality; hierarchy; rules, policies, and regulations; administration'; and technical expertise. Bureaucracy is described as priding itself on systematic processes based on calculable rules; precision; clearly established hierarchies; bureaucrats who are detached, obedient, and objective to discharge the business of the organization; rules, policies, and regulations to govern functions; technical expertise; and administrative duties to exercise authority in the regularity and continuity of the "rational" character of the system. In the name of legitimacy and through established rules that ensure uniformity, equity, consistency, and order, the bureaucratic system operates from a position of legal-rational authority to maximize efficiency (Weber, 1978). Weber's theory of bureaucracy has its place, serves its purpose, and remains prominent in public service and in formal and informal rules of conduct.

Weber (1978) describes the functional significance of neutrality as everyone being treated the same to ensure evenhandedness in critical processes. A key feature of neutrality is practitioners performing tasks of government according to explicit and objective standards versus personal or political loyalties or obligations (Kaufman, 1956). This has been preserved over time to shape practice and policy choices through systemic and traditional forces. Neutrality, as Weber argued, is the fundamental mechanism for modern society, anchored in rationality and imposing a rigid approach to public service. This rational and neutral structure of bureaucracy rests on "the belief in the legality of enacted rules and the rights of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (Weber, 1978, p. 215). Levitan (1942) identified two foundational propositions of neutrality: (1) civil servants abstain from participation in partisan politics, and (2) civil servants are ethically responsible for implementing policy decisions regardless of the political party in power. These two propositions require administrators to refrain from conflating politics and administration and adopt positions and behaviors proven to be destructive. Politics have an impact on bureaucracy and how it is carried out. The practice of neutrality played a distinctive role in insulating public administrators from partisan politics and was introduced during a transitional period from the spoils system and political patronage during the progressive era (Heidelberg, 2015).

Weber (1978) also asserted that the bureaucracy operates with regularity to exercise equality with the authority of the system, except for the "propertyless masses," who are not served by the formal "equality before the law" (980). The consciousness of these limitations is crucial to public professionals who interface directly or indirectly with people from different situations and varying life experiences. The rationality and neutrality demanded by the system do not account for such differences and societal context. Albeit the rigidity of the system's processes provides some discretion, employees must ultimately adhere to the rules and regulations to ensure consistency

and accountability. Mastracci et al. (2010) argued: "few professions demand more emotional labor from their employees than public service" (124).

Many public practitioners still see neutrality as good practice in public service and do not see how it enables bias and discrimination to flourish. Scholars at the 1968 Minnowbrook conference in New York rejected the traditional ideals of a neutral public administration practiced by a veneer of objective individuals. Despite the perceived evenhandedness of neutrality, scholars argue public administration cannot be neutral and public practitioners must consider their responsibilities and responsiveness to public service values, social equity, and social justice (Frederickson, 2005; Norman-Major, 2011; Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009).

THE PROBLEM WITH NEUTRALITY

Neutrality fortifies organizational impediments in public service and obscures an unequal relationship, detachment from disparate outcomes, and tensions between human interactions (Gooden, 2015). Frederickson (2010) asked, "for whom is the organization well managed? For whom is the organization efficient? For whom is the organization economical? For whom are public services more or less fairly delivered?" (Frederickson, 2010, p. xv). Scholars have challenged the ideal of neutrality based on its veiled implications for vulnerable, minoritized, and marginalized communities (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021; Frederickson, 1991, 2005; Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Gooden, 2015; Guy, 2021; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Hooks, 2013; Portillo et al., 2020; Stivers, 2015).

Neutrality veils a bureaucratic apparatus protecting the status quo of discriminatory legislative practices (Caiden, 1996; Gooden, 2015; Huber, 1991). The veil of neutrality refers to the belief that neutrality's evenhandedness is altruistic and a public good. The veil obscures legitimized biases, internal processes, assumptions, and disparate outcomes. The veil of neutrality is referred to in the literature as a rationalized myth that masks disparities in the equitable distribution of public services (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Portillo et al., 2020). Hooks (2013) argued White supremacist thinking and practice remain ingrained in the political foundations and systems within the U.S. She referred to this as "imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" which demanded obedience, subservience, submissiveness, and docile participation in an interlocking system (Hooks, 2013, p. 4).

Public practitioners remain locked in this system that demands obedience and complicity in reinforcing discriminatory and biased norms, policies, and practices. Stivers (2015) argued there is a common secular theodicy among people on both sides of the bureaucracy and neutrality divide. Kaufman (1981) proclaimed that institutions are "made" by humans and are subject to manipulation and elimination by the humans who strive to dominate.

TABLE 1 Aspects of neutrality.

Author (year)	Aspects of neutrality
Gaynor and Wilson (2020)	Fosters racial disparity and discrimination
Portillo et al. (2020)	A parochial standard had been set and legitimated…perpetrating significant major systematic and structural disparities
Guy and Mastracci (2018)	Discount actual interactions and experiences of human beings engaged in the process
Miller (2018)	Can be interpreted as empty can
Gooden (2015)	Obscures discrimination and generates disparate outcomes
Moynihan et al. (2015)	Increases burdens to navigate public systems and programs specifically in terms of race, class, and gender/identity
Stivers (2015)	Fails to recognize people's humanity
Agatsuma (2014)	Normalizes impersonal and detached public service
Caiden (1996)	May never consciously permit personal opinions to affect work but are rarely neutral
Huber (1991)	Remains buried in routines and distributional consequences

Those who might have enough knowledge and understanding of the negative implications of the veil of neutrality either do not always have the authority or responsibility to do anything about the problem or are invested in maintaining the status quo. Hummel (2014) described bureaucracy as handcuffing your hands and mind. We offer Table 1 as illustrative examples from the literature.

Neutrality does not regard how people are situated to ensure equity in outcomes. Neutrality underlines an emphasis on systematic thinking that interacts, overlaps, and contradicts itself in complex ways, causing tunnel vision that focuses on snapshots and outcomes in isolation from the larger whole (Senge, 2006; Stone, 2012). Discriminatory norms and practices are sustained in systems and structures and reinforced by public practitioners perpetuating these patterns—at times without biased intent (Alexander & Stivers, 2010; Starke et al., 2018). Minoritized and marginalized groups continue to encounter, navigate, and experience burdens in accessing critical public services, such as disaster response and recovery, social services, education, health care, and social welfare programs (Herd & Moynihan, 2018).

Weber (1978) wrote, "[t]he propertyless masses especially are not served by the formal 'equality before the law' and the 'calculable'" adjudication and administration demanded by bourgeois interests" (Weber, 1978, p. 980). As Weber (1978) described, an ideal bureaucratic system operates as it was designed, straightforwardly, without regard for personal considerations. Public

15406210, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/puar.13641 by Technische Universität Braunschweig, Wiley Online Library on [10/06/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

practitioners generally learn from institutionalized processes and historical traditions tainted by legacies of discriminatory blindness. We introduce the concept of discriminatory blindness, referring to veiled inequities, barriers, disparate outcomes, and burdens. Treating everyone the same in ways that are color-blind, culture-blind, gender-blind, and nationality-blind to fit the ideal of practice in some ill-conceived sense of responsibility remains an impediment in public service. Adams (2011) found that the common characteristics of administrative evil manifest when people "engage in acts of evil without being aware that they are doing anything at all wrong" (Adams, 2011, p. 277). How do we deconstruct these walls that confine our thinking and practice?

Hierarchy, rules and regulations, administration, and rationality have become tools of terror and broader sources of inequity based on bureaucracy's rigid and inflexible nature (Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Moynihan et al., 2015). Next, an argument is laid out for how the veil of neutrality perpetuates inequities at the intersection of objectivity and outcomes.

RAISING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PUBLIC PROFESSIONALS

The literature substantiates that neutrality is often sold as a positive feature, not a flaw, of public service. Neutrality is embedded in the ideological crevices of public service and, as standard practice, justifies questionable behavior. Behaving in ways that align with cultural norms reinforces restrictive learning styles (Agatsuma, 2014; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Kotter, 2007; Senge, 2006). Stivers (2015) argued that the threat posed by neutral anonymity is clear, and public professionals need to lift the veil of neutrality to reveal themselves not as indifferent and detached nobodies but as human beings in touch with their consciences, ready to make discretionary judgments. COVID-19 and the cascading and compounding impacts of systemic discrimination exacerbated issues of racism, bigotry, and stereotypes explicitly tied to Black and Brown people, LGBTQIA+, women, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, and lower socioeconomic groups (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021; Flinders, 2021; Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Gooden, 2017).

Neutrality obscures barriers to access, disparate outcomes, and burdens in navigating organizational systems. Neutrality buried in bureaucracy strips away autonomy, individuality, identity, and the presence of mind (Gooden, 2015; Huber, 1991; Miller, 2018). Employees are strongly influenced by their work environment, their values, behaviors, attitudes, and ingrained mental models that influence behavior (Cooper, 2020; Frederickson, 1991; Senge, 2006). Senge (2006) pointed out how organizations are designed and managed, how people's jobs are defined, and, most importantly, how we all have been taught to think and interact, creating fundamental organizational learning impediments based on fixed mental models.

Blessett (2015) noted that discriminatory practices are veiled in color-blind policies that promote equal treatment but create disparate outcomes based on institutional racism and structural inequality. A rigid internal structure, a closed and defensive environment, dysfunctional patterns of behavior, recurring habits that focus on predetermined outcomes, and short-term cosmetic solutions that create no progressive technical or practical growth in knowledge perpetuate an environment where organizational learning impediments thrive. Senge (2006) classified this as a failure to recognize impending threats, understand the implications of those threats, or come up with alternative solutions. Garvin (1993) argued that in the absence of learning, organizations and individuals are often prone to repeat old practices and engage in a cyclic pattern of learning where changes are superficial and improvements are often short-lived.

Iterative practices in organizations provide cues to shape learned behavior, and often actions and consequences are not seen in a cause-effect chain (Obasogie, 2013; Senge, 2006). Neutrality, as a concept, has not changed or evolved because it is arduous, complex, and grounded in routinization (Blessett, 2018; Guy & Mastracci, 2018). Frederickson (2010) argued equity is not present in operational detachment and public organizations operate based on misleading, unbiased, or consistent application of laws that often blur the disparities in outcomes they generate. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2012) similarly observed that judgments of perceived worthiness and identity might guide decisions that lead to equity or inequity as "workers decided who would be treated routinely, who would receive minimal or even harsh treatment, and who would be deemed worthy of extra, often exceptional attention and benefits" (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012, p. 516).

Neutrality may be attractive in principle, but it has a deceptive allure that normalizes discriminatory blindness, defensive reasoning, and fixed mindsets (Gooden, 2015, 2020; Senge, 2006). Stivers (2015) argued that it is literally impossible to practice an ethic of neutrality. In an ideal society, administrators could maintain the promoted value-free objective guidelines for efficient, productive, and inclusive processes to serve the public. However, an objective and neutral society contrast with the inherently biased, subjective, and value-laden social, political, and economic systems that exist in the U.S. Neutrality is not value-free as there is a range of perspectives, background contexts, and divergences in perceptions in any given situation (Portillo et al., 2020).

Mastracci and Sementelli (2021) argue that the legitimacy of neutrally neutered public professionals is no longer accepted. Debasing neutrality considerations of normative hierarchy and the superiority/superficiality of impartiality is an arduous process based on the ways institutions and organizations practice learning with an inability to reflect, evaluate, and correct underlying causes (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Frederickson et al., 2015). There

remains a need to stop and question the underlying forces driving decisions or generating disparities in practice and service to the public (Triantafillou, 2015).

The underlying force behind change requires organizations to target efforts toward creating a more competent, transparent, and effective government. Behavior matters, history matters, how people are treated matters, organizations matter, and the negative emotional implications for minoritized and marginalized groups' lived experiences, perceptions, and how they enter, occupy, and navigate space matter. Ford (2022) argues humanity matters above all for everyone in our governing institutions. He notes, "a myopic focus on human behavior over human individualism risks alienating the governed, reducing trust in government, and undermining the legitimacy of democratic governing institutions" (Ford, 2022, p. 525). Public administration often falls into the trap of neutrality and discriminatory blindness due to the high demands placed on public administration to address day-to-day needs, resolve emergencies and crises, and provide essential services to the population.

Peffer (2015) noted that developing cultural competence is not an optional, altruistic process. In many cases, strategies designed to change ingrained traditional and systemic issues will not always be successful, and there are different stages of learning and unlearning embedded norms. When public organizations approach change, what are they attempting to change? The following section examines how organizations can establish deliberate and committed efforts and periodic assessments to sustain changes, acknowledge and correct missteps, and take responsibility for how they operate.

EXPLORING CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A MECHANISM FOR CHANGE

There are different paths to change. The type of cultural competence for which we advocate utilizes a new lens to encourage people to envision optimal public service delivery, prioritizing action-oriented strategies and learning constructs to foster inclusion, equity, accessibility, and justice before efficient outcomes. Embarking on a quest to develop cultural competence is advantageous as it provides a foundation for building and developing practices to empirically test its suppositions (Blessett, 2015; Knox & Haupt, 2015: Peffer, 2015; Rice, 2008; Sweeting, 2022). In public service, scholars advocate for cultural competence development that is more integrative, generating practices that shift from a monocultural to a multicultural theory of knowledge (Bailey, 2015; Blessett, 2018; Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Norman-Major & Gooden, 2015; Rice, 2004, 2008, 2015; Sue, 2001). Cultural competence supports respecting differences by valuing diversity, changing policies and practices, and dismantling oppressive systems and structures to promote equitable, inclusive, accessible, and just public service (Norman-Major & Gooden, 2015).

Cross et al. (1989) defined cultural competence as a "set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Cross et al., 1989, p. 28). Cultural competence requires more conscious, intentional, and actionable efforts to assess and change traditional approaches and structures that address known disparities linked to systems and structures and traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality (Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Rice, 2008). Research on the development of cultural competence in public administration points to a public service that is responsive and committed to inclusion, fairness, diversity, and equity for all members of society (Blessett, 2018; Norman-Major & Gooden, 2015).

Geron (2002) argued that cultural competence is a means to provide more responsive public services and programs to correct disparities, meet the needs of a culturally diverse population, and enhance treatment and outcomes in the provision of public services. Rice (2007) identified four reasons for public organizations to embrace and support cultural competence initiatives. First, he argues public administrators and agencies need to understand different cultural contexts within public service interactions to adjust and provide variations in service. Second, organizations must identify and address existing problems and programs that negatively affect minority populations. Third, utilize organizational tools to escalate the relevance and importance of cultural competence to those most likely to use and benefit from them. Finally, he noted that culturally competent public practitioners and agencies are better equipped to fulfill the organization's mission, goals, and objectives.

A challenge underlying the cultural competence conceptual framework is the lack of a clear path toward its development. Scholars have argued that definitions and conceptualizations of cultural competence present culture as static, conflate culture with race and ethnicity, fail to account for diversity within diversity labels, and do not address systemic issues and structural power imbalances. Scholars, such as Taylor (2003) caution practitioners to avoid treating culture as a static phenomenon. She argues that a deep-level analysis of culture should not be seen as rigid, confining, or decontextualized to just acknowledging identities like race and ethnicity. Scholars have proposed critical race theory, cultural intelligence, and cultural humility as alternatives to cultural competence to move beyond the conventional notions of neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity (Alexander & Stivers, 2010; Bailey, 2015; Blessett & Gaynor, 2021; Taylor, 2003). Cultural competence has been challenged based on notions that if people share a race, they also share the same culture. Alexander and Stivers (2010) found that cultural competence is problematic because it over describes the role of culture and diffuses discussions of race. With these challenges and debates in mind, we focus on developing

TABLE 2 Adaptation of Cross' Cultural Competence Continuum (2012).

Cultural destructiveness	Forced assimilation, subjugation, rights, and privileges for dominant groups only
Cultural incapacity	Racism, maintaining stereotypes, unfair hiring practices
Cultural blindness	Differences ignored, "treat everyone the same," and meet needs of dominant groups
Cultural pre-competence	Explore cultural issues, are committed, assess needs of organization and individuals
Cultural competence	Recognize individual and cultural differences, seek advice from diverse groups, hire culturally unbiased staff
Cultural proficiency	Implement changes to improve services based on cultural needs
Advanced cultural proficiency	Actively value diversity and easily identify the connections of culture within every arena

cultural competence in ways that are not restrictive, decontextualized, rigid, or limiting.

The disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in racist narratives and attacks, and natural hazards in 2020 and 2021 culminated in an urgent need for fundamental change. The limitations of neutrality further demonstrate the necessity for organizations to embrace more intentional ways to examine how policies, practices, norms, and culture impact actual human beings.

APPLYING A LEARNING APPROACH TO NEUTRALITY

The theoretical frame for cultural competence introduced by Cross et al. has some shortcomings and has been extensively expanded to point to disparities and inequities in organizational practices, policies, and programs across different disciplines (Carrizales, 2019; Haupt & Knox, 2018; Norman-Major & Gooden, 2015; Rice, 2004, 2008, 2015). We introduce Cross's (Cross, 2008; Cross, 2012) framework in Table 2 to demonstrate how research has evolved along a continuum.

Cross' (2008, 2012) Cultural Competence Continuum (Table 2) is an identity development-based framework utilized to assess and measure an individual's or organization's cultural competence development. The framework encompasses seven phases on a developmental continuum from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency. Since 1989, scholars have applied a critical lens to cultural competence development to identify how organizations can design individualized services and consider alternatives beyond the 'one-size-fits-all' approach. We move beyond Cross et al.'s (2008, 2012)

continuum to focus on organizational, institutional, and individual learning that centers around disentangling from concepts, such as neutrality and questioning paradigms in public service (Argyris, 2010; Portillo et al., 2020; Starke Jr & Mastracci, 2022).

Cultural competence development embodies a synergy and solidarity based on common humanity, not just shared identity (Alexander & Stivers, 2010). Essentially, it involves emotional, physiological, and cognitive learning to unlearn fixed ways of thinking and acting (Guy & Mastracci, 2018). To resist clinging to notions of neutrality, we adopt Sweeting's (2022) framework designed around fostering engagement, empathy, equity, and ethics that outlines ways organizations can take responsibility for their actions, leaders can recognize how they make decisions from privileged positions, and public practitioners can reflect on their ethical responsibility to elevate practices that facilitate and mitigate disparate outcomes. Sweeting (2022) outlined eight types of actionable initiatives for organizations "to move beyond the nervous conversations that stymie change" (p. 433). They include: (1) facilitate ethical leadership engagement, empathy, and responsiveness; (2) specify strategic and operational goals; (3) incorporate awareness and sensitivity into policies, practices, programs, and procedures; (4) integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into human resource management; (5) cultivate a supportive, equitable, and inclusive organizational culture/climate; (6) reinforce and sustain a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; (7) employ sensitive and inclusive communications; and (8) implement targeted training and professional development. Sweeting (2022) argues these eight types of initiatives provide direct ways to guide organizations to engage in action to generate substantive change. The framework is designed to interface both internally and externally.

The association of neutrality with cultural competence and adapting Sweeting's (2022) framework will engage complex and cognitive elements for improved organizational learning. Carrizales (2019) advocated for cultural competence focused on organization and service delivery and the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration's (NASPAA) accrediting standard for professional education focused on cultural competence in public service. Table 3 connects Sweeting's (2022) framework, which includes eight actionable initiatives and 30 related sub-initiatives, with Cross's (Cross, 2008, Cross, 2012) Cultural Competence Continuum and learning constructs.

At the foundation of this framework is the focus on action, questioning and the interrogating conventions, and recognition that culture is not monolithic. Public practitioners need to understand and develop a greater consciousness of intersections of identity and how this sets the stage for navigating public service (Portillo et al., 2020). We build upon and explore in more detail the eight types of initiatives.

TABLE 3 Cultural competence learning and action-oriented framework.

Sweeting's (2022) actionable steps (adapted with permission)	Cross et al. (2008, 2012) continuum	Organization learning outcomes (Argyris, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996)
Initiative type 1: Facilitate ethical leadership engagement, empathy, and responsiveness • Leadership responsibilities • Empathic and responsive leadership • Leadership commitment • Leadership accountability	Cultural competence	Responsibility and ownness should be taken up by leadership at all levels. Those with more power are expected to be mindful, listen, learn, question, engage, reflect, then act. Through action and deeds, those in power can drive changes that center the human experience and disrupt the practice of neutrality
Initiative type 2: Specify strategic and operational goals • Conduct an organizational assessment • Ethically engage and address disparities: Call to Action • Develop targeted and intentional intervention strategies • Convey expectations and engage communities	Cultural pre-competence	People are apprehensive about using explicit language, setting precise targets, researching, and establishing tangible steps to drive action. Craft strategies that get to the core of issues. Examine the context and conduct an assessment to create a starting point for change efforts. Formulate clear, incremental, and developmental goals that can be evaluated
Initiative type 3: Incorporate awareness and sensitivity in policies, practices, programs, and procedures • Debias documents • Identify and acknowledge inherent biases • Incorporate cultural awareness and sensitivity in organizational documents • Outline responsibilities and set expectations	Cultural competence	Audit and disrupt passive language in policies to ensure that policy changes do not become blanket solutions. Using inclusive language and understanding how language is interpreted is critical to identifying the roots and patterns of organizational policies, practices, and perspectives. A shifting mindset where employees do not take on the persona of organizations as impartial beings
Initiative type 4: Integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into human resource management • Analyze demographics and hiring trends • Develop targeted recruitment strategies • Establish partnerships and expand outreach to minority-serving institutions and organizations • Build a diverse and representative workforce	Cultural proficiency	Organizations reflect on the demographics of the population they serve. This means that the quality of workforce representation is more important than quantifying representation. Challenge long-standing HR practices and utilize skills to advocate and improve the quality of experiences. Interrogate the rigidity of HRM practices
Initiative type 5: Cultivate a supportive, equitable, and inclusive organizational culture/climate • Conduct a comprehensive culture and climate assessment • Incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences • Establish guiding principles for behaviors and actions • Promote shared value systems that respect diversity	Cultural proficiency	Mobilize efforts to increase understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between groups. Challenge norms and actively work to foster an environment that is diverse, inclusive, equitable, just, and accessible. Raise consciousness around culture and climate with change agents, how environments influence culture and climate, and how to practice with empathy
Initiative type 6: Reinforce and sustain a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion • Establish milestones and metrics to monitor progress • Engage in collaborative efforts and leverage best practices • Institute accountability and oversight measures	Advanced cultural proficiency	All change efforts require some long-term commitment to reexamine persistent patterns and question the basis for action. Seek to empower others to help, allocating resources (people, time, money). Recognition that real change requires continuous reflection, continual investment, and adaptability to sustain and operationalize efforts
Initiative type 7: Employ sensitive and inclusive communications • Establish targeted communication strategies • Demonstrate sensitivity in language/tone • Raise awareness of racial disparities and create a safe space for uncomfortable conversations • Reinforce values through continuous and consistent communications	Cultural proficiency	Create space to share experiences, engage in dialogue, and provide training to develop cultural and linguistic competence. Advocacy and eliminating defensive reasoning mindsets. Showing up to listen, participate, reflect, and ignite the movement
Initiative type 8: Implement targeted training and professional development • Assess workforce training and professional development needs • Create sensitivity training and professional development • Access effectiveness and ensure continuity	Cultural competence	More than a one-and-done approach-ongoing professional development is essential. Teaching practitioners about competencies and values to develop skilled, socially conscious, and responsible administrators aware of social equity and justice. Learning occurs when knowledge is introduced, reinforced, and accessed to unlearn ingrained practices and generate new ways of thinking. It requires opportunities to reflect and adjust

Initiative type 1: Facilitate ethical leadership engagement, empathy, and responsiveness

Leaders set the tone from the top and are instrumental in sustaining or hindering change. Lopez-Littleton et al. (2018) pointed out, "Changing the tide of discrimination and injustice requires leadership and institutional support to advance organizational culture and galvanize buy-in from subordinates in public organizations or students in the classroom." (p. 460). This may connect to an individual's reluctance to see themselves responsible for systemic woes. One challenge to the development of cultural competence is a prevailing, locked worldview and the subsequent rejection of any information that contradicts that viewpoint (Benavides, 2014). Change occurs when there is a disruption of structural inequities and disparities rooted in policies, practices, and informal and formal structures that may be destructive to specific cultural groups.

Initiative type 2: Specify strategic and operational goals

Strategic and operational goals provide a baseline for organizations to realistically take stock of where they are currently and garner insight and understanding of the work they must do to produce specific and practical strategies and goals. Many factors demonstrate serious intent for organizations to engage in meaningful change in values and behavior. These factors include finely detailed strategies; how barriers and challenges are described; whether disparities are acknowledged and identified; whether data are consulted; and whether organizations engage in analysis, assessment, or other activities to identify barriers and challenges with intentionality. The idea that public administrators are conducting cultural assessment through a lens tainted by objectivity and neutrality is likely also to impair the development of goals.

Initiative type 3: Incorporate awareness and sensitivity in policies, practices, programs, and procedures

Public administration remains fraught with policies, programs, and procedures whose language and tone are riddled with blatant and veiled discriminatory practices. Interrogating organizational documents and replacing biased language with more inclusive language will disrupt historical traditions, institutionalized values and behaviors, and prejudicial policies, practices, programs, and procedures. As a first step, organizational leaders at all levels need to reflect and analyze procedural and structural policies, written and unwritten, that disadvantage some more than others. As a discipline and applied field of practice, public administration must confront the complexities of veiled ideologies to break down and dismantle historical legacies of discrimination and oppression rooted in systems, structures, norms, and traditions and foster lasting change. These are usually embedded in institutional norms or policies designed to further burden and exclude marginalized and minoritized demographic groups (Moynihan et al., 2015).

Initiative type 4: Integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into human resource management (HRM)

HRM means the quality of experiences in representation matters more than the quantity of diverse bodies. Historical legacies of racial discrimination remain a problem in all aspects of human resource management. Human resource management needs to encompass equity as a priority to foster inclusion and a sense of belonging, as such efforts will influence how people are treated and will impact how employees show up and participate. Many organizations continue to lose bright, energetic individuals with the passion and courage to interrogate systems and structures of power. Within this context, cultural competence development provides ways for individuals and organizations to embrace and build shared value systems, foster a vision for change efforts, diversify the workforce, develop more inclusive policies, and cultivate and sustain changing mental models to eradicate deeply ingrained ideologies in organizational norms and practices. Research has consistently found that HRM practitioners need a more equitable and inclusive lens and the forging of more direct paths to diversify leadership positions.

Initiative type 5: Cultivate a supportive, equitable, and inclusive organizational culture and climate

Organization culture/climate focuses on the mindful and intentional interrogation of norms, which requires reflecting on and seeking transformative ways to eradicate dominant, normalized, and accepted behavior. Each organization exists with its own institutional culture, climate, and environment. Interrogating cultural milieus and dismantling conventional norms require a concerted effort to shift mindsets and center the human experience in all aspects of public service. Increasing awareness allows for identifying prevailing norms and disrupting oppressive cultures and climates. Organizational culture has a certain rigidity, so those in positions of power (leadership) will need to prioritize and embody ethical practices and values in their behaviors (Lopez-Littleton et al., 2018, p. 460). Efforts to dismantle oppressive norms also change how minoritized and marginalized people engage, occupy, and navigate public service, having faced varying degrees of oppression, exclusion, discrimination,

poverty, and trauma. The objective is to create inclusive spaces to foster a healing and transformative culture and climate.

Initiative type 6: Reinforce and sustain a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion

Cultural competence is essential for organizations seeking to build capacity and sustain a commitment to ongoing work. Commitment means longevity is built into strategic priorities requiring the allocation of resources (people, time, and money). This includes utilizing the experience of organizational members, creating space to interface and gather insight, collaborating, sharing power, and encouraging everyone to commit to greater change. Commitment centers on reflexivity, acknowledgment of missteps, and adaptability, with explicit action steps putting systems in place to ensure longevity and sustained efforts to operationalize and embed a human-first approach.

Initiative type 7: Employ sensitive and inclusive communications

Communication requires sparking crucial and real conversations and amplifying the voices of those with experience navigating the turbulence of traditional ideologies to discern when, why, and how to speak boldly in words and through action. Through communication, organizations can galvanize change beyond neutrality. All leaders are not great communicators, and communication is critical to enhancing and sustaining change efforts. Communication requires leaders to be humbly bold in their words, publicize a commitment to social equity and justice, supported by their actions, and unwavering commitment to reshape organizational systems and structures, generate support, and build solidarity among people within and outside the system. Systems and structures do not change without people.

Initiative type 8: Implement targeted training and professional development

Training and professional development aim to broaden knowledge bases and keep employees up to date with changes in their respective fields. There is a need to drive efforts to decolonize the mind by focusing on systemic changes and educating people to listen, learn, question, reflect, and act. Eradicate repeating decades-old approaches, incanting definitions, and restating the same techniques that have been used since the 1960s that are ineffective (Bernstein et al., 2020). Learning must be expanded and enhanced to chart a pathway of intellectual growth and build a shared vision of empathy and compassion, not just another tool to solve or explicate problems (Alexander & Stivers, 2010; Argyris, 2010). Training and professional development are essential to expanding knowledge, recognizing failures and successes, and learning from both. Training and professional development also need to be exquisitely tailored to meet the needs of the organization and individual departments—what does neutrality look like in budgeting, human resources, healthcare, education, and so forth? Essentially, people will have different entry points for engaging in uncomfortable conversations, and organizations need to contend with the full scope of reality and the exact nature of individuals, priorities, attitudes, conditions, behaviors, and actions deployed to face real situations and overcome rather than cultivate organizational learning impediments (Lopez-Littleton et al., 2018). Training needs to be mandated as an organizational imperative, not recommended, or encouraged.

The framework for action and development of cultural competence has been presented through the view of learning to demonstrate how cultural competence can be advanced by critically interrogating the systems we blindly obey. We assert that the eight types of initiatives are wide-ranging and cover a myriad of contexts. Still, we argue that these efforts can enhance organizational efforts to focus on concerns about rights, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice. Each type of initiative is helpful as it embeds social equity and social justice values that can be explored independently of other initiatives. Organizations can embark on these types of initiatives in no specific order. However, Initiative Types 1 and 2 are foundational to getting started. A challenge, however, is working through these types of initiatives more systematically in complex bureaucratic environments. It takes all of us to move forward, and although people remain hostile toward advocacy for social equity and social justice, efforts must carry on. Through this framework, organizations can intentionally inform intervention programs to influence and change behavior and disrupt conventional ways of doing things. Subverting dominant norms requires them to be unveiled, and because the experiences of cultural incompetence are greater than the sum of their parts, any analysis that does not consider the framework presented cannot sufficiently address the impediment of organizational neutrality.

The need exists for public organizations and institutions to seek ways and opportunities to advance public service and discern an alternate paradigm that fits current times. Some scholars argue the strength and magnitude of cultural competence are well understood in public administration; however, the field has not kept pace with societal developments and demands (Carrizales et al., 2016; Lopez-Littleton & Blessett, 2015). We need to be ruthlessly realistic in pursuing shared organizational purposes because dialogues around race, discrimination, equity, justice, and marginalization are complex, continue

to generate hostility, and make people uncomfortable. We need to be less anxious to move boldly to bypass the discriminatory blindness of neutrality, debunk racial stereotypes, and actively work to reconcile the tensions at the foundations of public administration.

CONCLUSION

Public administration faces a shifting paradigm that challenges neutrality as a bedrock. In this research, we adapted a framework to forge ahead with eight actionable types of cultural competence initiatives and learning constructs to mitigate disparate aspects of neutrality in public service. This article focused on the performative illusion of neutrality as an organizational learning impediment that preserves and promotes disparities, inequities, and exclusion based on the premise of objectivity. It's time to move beyond the performative illusion of neutrality to rebalance and recalibrate public service mechanisms. To disrupt the deep entrenchment of neutrality that veils how the evenhandedness of efficiency reinforces exploitation, control, power, and dominance, it requires us to disentangle ourselves and unlearn what we have been socialized to adopt as norms.

Public practitioners must become skilled at navigating and disarming the ubiquitous minefields of public service once boots hit the ground. Development of cultural competence requires work at the individual, collective, and organizational levels embedded in empathy, ethics, engagement, and equity (Meyer et al., 2022). Starke et al. (2018) argued it is the ethical responsibility of public administration programs to educate and prepare students to become culturally competent administrators. By default, failure to prioritize cultural competence would perpetuate dominant biased perspectives. The development of cultural competence requires reconstituting long-standing traditional modes of doing business as value hierarchies. Such a reconstitution can ensure that organizations intentionally and meaningfully engage with proposed changes and articulate an ethical commitment and responsibility to raise the consciousness of public practitioners.

As a discipline and field of practice, neutrality remains a mechanism that crushes humanity. As Hooks (2013) wrote, "…we would all need to look at the ways we are accountable for continually creating and maintaining this system of domination" (Hooks, 2013, p. 39). We all have a role to play in ridding public service of the neutrality's orthodoxy, seeing the humanity in people, and standing at the forefront of change, advocating for social equity and social justice. The development of cultural competence requires intentional and iterative learning to move beyond quick fixes and performative efforts. Cultural competence efforts begin with a strong focus on learning and embracing a journey that critically interrogates dominant narratives, values, and ideologies at the root or within the foundation of traditionalist thinking and organizational structures. We face critical challenges in public administration, and the future will be informed by actions taken today and whether we move forward together in solidarity.

ORCID
Karen D. Sweeting https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6211-4682
Brittany "Brie" Haupt https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2256-6940

REFERENCES

Adams, Guy. B. 2011. "The Problem of Administrative Evil in a Culture of Technical Rationality." *Public Integrity* 13(3): 275–86.

Agatsuma, Soh. 2014. "Differentiating Two Kinds of Neutrality." *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 23(4): 238–45.

Alexander, Jennifer, and Camilla Stivers. 2010. "An Ethic of Race for Public Administration." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 32(4): 578–97.

Argyris, Chris. 2010. *Organizational traps: Leadership, culture, organizational design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schön. 1996. *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method, and Practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Bailey, Margo L. 2015. "Cultural Competency and the Practice of Public Administration." In *Diversity and Public Administration*, edited by Mitchell F. Rice, 179–96. New York, NY: Routledge.

Benavides, Abraham David. 2014. "Cultural Competency in Hispanic Communities." In *Cultural Competency for Public Administrators*, edited by Kristen A. Norman-Major and Susan Gooden, 100–20. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bernstein, Ruth Sessler, Morgan Bulger, Paul Salipante, and Judith Y. Weisinger. 2020. "From Diversity to Inclusion to Equity: A Theory of Generative Interactions." *Journal of Business Ethics* 167: 395–410.

Blessett, Brandi. 2015. "Disenfranchisement: Historical Underpinnings and Contemporary Manifestations." *Public Administration Quarterly* 39(1): 3–50.

Blessett, Brandi. 2018. "Rethinking the Administrative State through an Intersectional Framework." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 42(1): 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2018.1517526.

Blessett, Brandi, and Tia Sherèe Gaynor. 2021. "Race, Racism and Administrative Callousness: Using Critical Race Theory for a Race-Conscious Public Administration." *Public Integrity* 23(5): 455–8.

Burnes, Bernard. 1996. "No Such Thing as… a 'One Best Way' to Manage Organizational Change." *Management Decision* 34(10): 11–8.

Caiden, Gerald E. 1996. "The concept of neutrality." In *Democratization and bureaucratic neutrality*, edited by, Haile K. Asmerom and Elisa P. Reis, 20–44. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carrizales, Tony. 2019. "Cultural Competency." *Public Administration Quarterly* 43(1): 28–51.

Carrizales, Tony, Anne Zahradnik, and Michelle Silverio. 2016. "Organizational Advocacy of Cultural Competency Initiatives: Lessons for Public Administration." *Public Administration Quarterly* 40(1): 126–55.

Cooper, Christopher A. 2020. "Public Servants, Anonymity, and Political Activity Online: Bureaucratic Neutrality in Peril?" *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 86(3): 496–512.

Cross, Terry L. 2008. "Cultural Competence." In *The Encyclopedia of Social Work*, Vol 1, edited by Terry Mizrahi and Larry Davis, 487–91. Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand.

Cross, Terry. 2012. "Cultural competence continuum." *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work* 24: 83–5.

Cross, Terry L., Barbara J. Bazron, Karl W. Dennis, and Mareasa R. Isaacs. 1989. "Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who Are Severely Emotionally Disturbed." *Institute of Educational Services* 1–75. Washington, DC: CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Georgetown University Child Development Center. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED330171.pdf.

Ferdman, Bernardo M., and Barbara R. Deane, eds. 2014. *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion*, Vol 33. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Flinders, Matthew. 2021. "Democracy and the Politics of Coronavirus: Trust, Blame and Understanding." *Parliamentary Affairs* 74(2): 483–502.

Ford, Michael R. 2022. "Making People Matter: Moving toward a Humanity-Based Public Administration." *Administration & Society* 54(3): 522–39.

Frederickson, H. George. 1991. "Toward a Theory of the Public for Public Administration." *Administration & Society* 22(4): 395–417.

Frederickson, H. George. 2005. "Whatever Happened to Public Administration? Governance, Governance Everywhere." In *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*, edited by Ewan Ferlie, Laurence E. Lynn Jr, and Christopher Pollitt, 282–304. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Frederickson, H. George. 2010. *Social Equity and Public Administration: Origins, Developments, and Applications*. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe Inc.

Frederickson, H. George, Kevin B. Smith, Christopher W. Larimer, and Michael J. Licari. 2015. *The Public Administration Theory Primer*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Garvin, David A. 1993. "Building a Learning Organization." *Harvard Business Review* 71(4): 78–91.

Gaynor, Tia Sherèe, and Meghan E. Wilson. 2020. "Social Vulnerability and Equity: The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19." *Public Administration Review* 80(5): 832–8.

Geron, Scott Miyake. 2002. "Cultural competency: How is it measured? Does it make a difference?." *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 26(3): 39–45.

Gooden, Susan T. 2015. *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gooden, Susan T. 2017. "Social Equity and Evidence: Insights from Local Government." *Public Administration Review* 77(6): 822–8.

Gooden, Susan T. 2020. "Special Edition—Social Equity, the Pandemic, and the Police (Season 1, Episode 3)." In *Management Matters Podcast*. National Academy of Public Administration https://napawash.org/podcasts/special-edition-social-equity-the-pandemic-and-the-police-with-fellow-susan-gooden.

Guy, Mary E. 2021. "Expanding the Toolbox: Why the Citizen-State Encounter Demands it." *Public Performance & Management Review* 44(5): 1100–17.

Guy, Mary E., and Sharon H. Mastracci. 2018. "Making the Affective Turn: The Importance of Feelings in Theory, Praxis, and Citizenship." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 40(4): 281–8.

Haupt, Brittany, and Claire Connolly Knox. 2018. "Measuring Cultural Competence in Emergency Management and Homeland Security Higher Education Programs." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 24(4): 538–56.

Heidelberg, Roy L. 2015. "Public Administration, Popular Sovereignty, and la Police." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 37(3): 162–73.

Herd, P., and D. P. Moynihan. 2018. *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

hooks, bell. 2013. *Writing beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Huber, George P. 1991. "Organizational Learning: The Contributing Processes and the Literatures." *Organization Science* 2(1): 88–115.

Hummel, R. P. 2014. *The Bureaucratic Experience: The Post-Modern Challenge: The Post-Modern Challenge*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kaufman, Herbert. 1956. "Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration." *American Political Science Review* 50(4): 1057–73.

Kaufman, Herbert. 1981. "Fear of Bureaucracy: A Raging Pandemic." *Public Administration Review* 41(1): 1–9.

King, Cheryl Simrell, and Camilla Stivers. 1998. "Citizens and Administrators: Roles and Relationships." In *Public Administration and Society: Critical Issues in American Governance*, edited by Richard Box, 49–67. New York, NY: Routledge.

Knox, C. C., and B. Haupt. 2015. "Incorporating Cultural Competency Skills in Emergency Management Education." *Disaster Prevention and Management* 24(5): 619–34.

Kotter, John. 2007. "Leading Change: "Why Transformation Efforts Fail"." *Harvard Business Review* 86: 97–103.

Kriegel, R. J., and D. Brandt. 2008. *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers: Developing Change-Ready People and Organizations*. New York, NY: Hachette UK.

Levitan, David M. 1942. "The Neutrality of the Public Service." *Public Administration Review* 2(4): 317–23.

Lopez-Littleton, V., and B. Blessett. 2015. "A Framework for Integrating Cultural Competency into the Curriculum of Public Administration Programs." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 21(4): 557–74.

Lopez-Littleton, Vanessa, Brandi Blessett, and Julie Burr. 2018. "Advancing Social Justice and Racial Equity in the Public Sector." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 24(4): 449–68.

Mastracci, S. H., M. A. Newman, and M. E. Guy. 2010. "Emotional Labor: Why and how to Teach it." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 16(2): 123–41.

Mastracci, Sharon, and Arthur J. Sementelli. 2021. "Neutrality Narratives, Gender, and Fear of Cuckoldry in Public Administration." *Organization* 29(4): 770–780.

Maynard-Moody, Steven, and Michael Musheno. 2012. "Social Equities and Inequities in Practice: Street-Level Workers as Agents and Pragmatists." *Public Administration Review* 72(s1): S16–23.

McCord, Robert D. 2019. "*The New Veil of Race-Neutrality: A Critical Race Perspective on the Disproportionate Police Killings of Unarmed Black Males*." Ph.d. dissertation. Jonesboro: Arkansas State University.

Meyer, John. W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–63.

Meyer, Seth J., Richard Greggory Johnson III, and Sean McCandless. 2022. "Moving the field forward with empathy, engagement, equity, and ethics." *Public Integrity* 24(4-5): 422–431.

Miller, Hugh T. 2018. "Neutrality as it Never Was: A Short Treatise on Public Administration Theory." *International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior* 21: 192–210.

Moynihan, Donald, Pamela Herd, and Hope Harvey. 2015. "Administrative Burden: Learning, Psychological, and Compliance Costs in Citizen-State Interactions." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25(1): 43–69.

Norman-Major, Kristen. 2011. "Balancing the Four E s; or Can we Achieve Equity for Social Equity in Public Administration?" *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 17(2): 233–52.

Norman-Major, Kristen A., and Susan T. Gooden, eds. 2015. *Cultural Competency for Public Administrators*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Obasogie, Osagie. 2013. "Blinded by Sight." In *Stanford University Press*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Peffer, Shelly L. 2015. "Legally Competent Public Servants: State Statutory and Regulatory Mandated Cultural Competence Provisions." In *Cultural Competency for Public Administrators*, edited by Kristen A. Norman-Major and Susan Gooden, 40–54. New York, NY: Routledge.

Portillo, Shannon, Domonic Bearfield, and Nicole Humphrey. 2020. "The Myth of Bureaucratic Neutrality: Institutionalized Inequity in Local Government Hiring." *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 40(3): 516–31.

Rice, Mitchell F. 2004. "Organizational Culture, Social Equity, and Diversity: Teaching Public Administration Education in the Postmodern Era." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 10(2): 143–54.

Rice, Mitchell F. 2007. "Promoting Cultural Competency in Public Administration and Public Service Delivery: Utilizing Self-Assessment Tools and Performance Measures." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 13(1): 41–57.

Rice, Mitchell F. 2008. "A Primer for Developing a Public Agency Service Ethos of Cultural Competency in Public Services Programming and Public Services Delivery." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 14(1): 21–38.

Rice, Mitchell F. 2015. *Diversity and Public Administration*. New York, NY: ME Sharpe.

Senge, Peter M. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Starke, A. M., N. Heckler, and J. Mackey. 2018. "Administrative Racism: Public Administration Education and Race." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 24(4): 469–89.

Starke, A. M., r., and S. H. Mastracci. 2022. "Epistemic Racism and Sexism in Public Administration and theory's Unfinished Business." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 45(1): 16–24.

Stivers, Camilla. 2015. "Rule by Nobody: Bureaucratic Neutrality as Secular Theodicy." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 37(4): 242–51.

Stone, Deborah. 2012. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.

Sue, Derald Wing. 2001. "Multidimensional Facets of Cultural Competence." *The Counseling Psychologist* 29(6): 790–821.

Sweeting, Karen D. 2022. "Strategies to Foster Engagement, Empathy, Equity, and Ethics in Public Service: A Conceptual Model for Public and Nonprofit Administrators." *Public Integrity* 24(4–5): 432–47.

Taylor, Janelle S. 2003. "The Story Catches you and you Fall Down: Tragedy, Ethnography, and Cultural Competence." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 17(2): 159–81.

Triantafillou, Peter. 2015. "The Politics of Neutrality and the Changing Role of Expertise in Public Administration." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 37(3): 174–87.

U.S Department of Urban Development [HUD]. 2022. Letter Finding Noncompliance with Title VI and Section 109. Case #09-21-1483-6/9 https://texashousers.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HUD-Letter-Finding-Noncompliance-with-Title-VI-and-Section-109-.pdf.

Weber, M. 1978. In *Economy and Society*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Wooldridge, Blue, and Susan Gooden. 2009. "The Epic of Social Equity: Evolution, Essence, and Emergence." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 31(2): 222–34.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Karen D. Sweeting is an Assistant Professor at the University of Rhode Island. Dr. Sweeting strives to examine how public service can be more equitable, inclusive, and just, focusing on interrogating assumptions, systems, values, language, policies, and practices as they relate to identity, equity, inclusion, and justice for those working within public sector organizations *and* for those who benefit from and interact with public programs, specifically vulnerable, minoritized and marginalized populations.
Email: ksweeting@uri.edu

Brittany "Brie" Haupt is an Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness Department with research interests of cultural competency, emergency and crisis management, crisis communication, and community resilience. Dr. Haupt has published in numerous journals and has an award-winning book, with Dr. Claire Connolly Knox, on Cultural Competence for Emergency and Crisis Management: Concepts, Theories, and Case Studies. Haupt also published Crisis Communication Planning and Strategies for Nonprofit Leaders.
Email: hauptb@vcu.edu