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Culture and Leadership

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Abstract

Although leadership is a critical step in policy implementation, simplistic models of leadership are at odds with the complexities and subtleties of public administration. Traditional models of leadership pervade our society and condition our public managers from a very early age. Those ingrained top-down models frustrate policy implementers—or public servants—by making the least, rather than the most, of our critical human resources.

Programs in public administration and public affairs, as well as in business and management, are expending a great deal of effort in undoing the assumptions that students bring to the classroom; as a corollary, they are ignoring the problems and constraints of such deep seated, albeit simplistic, views. Those simplistic assumptions essentially follow an authoritarian, or Theory X,

model. Thus, public management is driven by assumptions about leadership that are widely accorded legitimacy by the workforce, which is exposed to Theory X type role models from birth. Those role models are reinforced throughout adulthood in movies, on television, in popular fiction, on the playing fields, in the comics, etc.

Although simplistic assumptions are widely discredited in the research-based literature, few people are exposed to that literature or taught those research findings. Most people in positions of public sector leadership come from fields where there is little but the stereotypes to inform their expectations: law, medicine, engineering, social work, education, etc. If better leadership “prescriptions” are to be constructed, they will have to rely on lessons of successful leadership through new lenses, and the literature of leadership offers especially powerful lenses, often focusing on partnerships as a means to the stated goals of a particular public policy.

Culture and Leadership

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Leadership for Policy Implementation

The implementation of public policy is one of the enduring frustrations of government. In a comprehensive overview of the subject in the *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration*, David J. Houston (1998, p. 1093) holds that “implementation typically involves a wide range of actors with diverse interests and competing goals, including formal policymakers, bureaucratic officials from all levels of government..., private sector organizations, nonprofit organizations, clientele groups, and other interested citizen groups.” Although he does include “planning, communicating, negotiating” among the “activities” of implementation, nowhere in his comprehensive review of the subject does he mention leadership or partnership, per se. Rather, he describes comprehensive theories of policy implementation that involve many variables. Our first premise is that leadership is an equally important activity; perhaps the most important part of the activity mix.

Our second premise is that simplistic models of leadership are at odds with the complexities and subtleties of public policy implementation. Traditional, simplistic models of leadership pervade our society and condition our public managers from a very early age. Those ingrained top-down models frustrate policy implementers—or public servants—by making the least, rather than the most, of our critical human resources.

Models of excellent leadership can be especially powerful in informing the study of public administration/implementation. They offer salient models that can gain and maintain the attention of busy policy implementers. If better leadership “prescriptions” are to be constructed, they will have to rely on lessons of successful leadership through new lenses, and the literature of leadership offers especially powerful lenses, often focusing on partnerships as a means to the stated goals of a particular public policy.

Our third premise is that programs in public administration and public affairs, as well as in business and management, are expending a great deal of effort in undoing the assumptions that students bring to the classroom; as a corollary, they are ignoring the problems and constraints of such deep seated, albeit simplistic, views. Those simplistic assumptions essentially follow an authoritarian, or Theory X, model:

- a. Leaders must be strong and decisive; under continuous pressure, they must act on the spot, reaching decisions without taking much time to consider the subtleties and implications.
- b. Leaders are expected to act as authoritarian, lone decision makers; they may solicit advice, but their operative paradigm is “the buck stops here,” the adage that the decision is on their desk, on their watch. They are expected to act, and they do so as much to serve their egos as to respond to the expectations of their colleagues, superiors and board members that they present a strong and decisive persona.
- c. The “team” must back up the leader, right or wrong. Team members do not argue; soldiers carry out their orders, athletes execute their plays, and subordinates follow directions.
- d. Authority emanates from the top and is to be automatically accepted. Members of an organization, paid or volunteer, rarely talk back or challenge top-down directives. And they are just as rarely ignored in the formulation of decisions and strategies.
- e. Leaders know best and the workforce must therefore follow. Generals and Secretaries of Defense view wars as too complex for the average soldier or citizen to understand. Principals view education as too complex for students, parents, and even teachers to comprehend.

Thus, public management is driven by assumptions about leadership that are widely accorded legitimacy by the workforce, which is exposed to Theory X type role models from birth.

- a. Young children are socialized to follow the authoritative directions of their parents. This is a necessary pattern of survival and cultural transference that often continues throughout the life cycle of parents’ relationships to their children.
- b. As they grow and gain independence, other authority-oriented role models insert themselves:
- c. Students are expected to follow the lead of their teachers, and later their professors, who are given immense authority to direct, judge, punish and reward.
- d. Student-actors must follow the directions of the drama coach or director of the school play.
- e. Student-athletes are acculturated never to question the edicts from their coaches.

Those role models are reinforced throughout adulthood. The prevailing stereotype of the authoritative leader is reinforced and appears in multiple venues:

- a. On the Silver Screen. In “Patton,” George C. Scott portrays the revered general as a larger than life figure, intimidating his troops into courageous actions, accusing slackers of cowardice, exposing himself to enemy fire as an exemplar to his troops. That image, as portrayed by other actors representing real and fictional characters, is a thread through movies of wartime “action” and Cold War deception, of the Wild West, of police and fire heroics.
- b. On television, shows offer prime-time stereotypes of those in command, almost hourly: authoritative police commanders on “Law and Order,” a decisive doctor on “House,” and a confident President on the “West Wing.” Commercials on both TV and radio almost invariably present the boss as a figure to be feared and to be pleased. The executive’s voice is loud and strong, his or her manner is forceful, and his or her subordinates are relegated to inferior positions.
- c. Popular fiction—the genre of Michael Crichton and colleagues—deals primarily in stereotypes of powerful figures (albeit sometimes bumbling as he/she ignores the advice of subordinates). Novels of politics or crime trade in images of strong Presidents, CIA Directors, admirals and generals, commissioners and commanders. The language is idiomatic, and the characterizations are two dimensional.
- d. Sports. The image of the lone, aggressive decision maker is reinforced daily, and especially on the weekends, through athletic contests, televised or in person: the football or basketball coach pacing the sidelines, playing the role of chess master, while the players are simply pieces on the game board; the baseball manager sitting at the end of the bench strategizing; the Olympic coach directing the preparation of the compliant skater or runner; the World Cup coach shouting at the soccer team.
- e. Comics. Although the boss is often portrayed as insensitive, the power relationship is that of superior to inferior. In “Dilbert” the staff typically suffers from the wrong-headed behavior of management, but the incumbent, incompetent managers seem to survive. In “Dagwood” the boss is the productivity figure, while Dagwood is the buffoon.

Although simplistic assumptions are widely discredited in the research-based literature, few people are exposed to that literature or taught those research findings. In the U.S., tens of millions of people staff public and quasi-public organizations (non-profits, private sector contractors). Only a very small percentage (in the range of some tens of thousands) are educated in public management at the graduate level (Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Policy and similar degrees), and even many of those graduates have never been exposed to courses on leadership, per se. Most people in positions of public sector leadership come from fields where there is little but the stereotypes to inform their expectations: law, medicine, engineering, social work, education, etc.

Leadership as a Complex Construction

As alternatives to the simplistic assumptions that inundate our children and that are reinforced through adulthood by the media, analyses and case studies of leadership offer a set of creative recommendations for how our courses on leadership, motivation and behavior might more effectively reverse the notions of authority that our society so pervasively communicates,

suggesting alternative models that would make much better use of our human resources in the quest for more effective public organizations and programs. We cannot govern in the 21st century from 1st century models such as the Caesars.

As examples of the efficiency and power of leadership cases, we cite the examples of two federal administrators: Nancy Hanks of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Colin Powell of the Department of Defense (DOD). Both are examples of how cases may help develop models for leadership, and both offer insights on building and maintaining sometimes fragile partnerships.

The Case of Nancy Hanks

Nancy Hanks, according to Richard Loverd (1997), as the second chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts (1969-1977) is generally acknowledged to have been an especially successful policy implementer who executed a strategy for advancing and adapting the agency to a changing policy environment. Hanks brought unusually deep and broad leadership skills to the NEA.

During Hanks' tenure, the agency budget increased twelve fold. Its staff increased six fold. The number of applications for funding increased tenfold. The number of grant awards rose by a factor of seven. Overall, Hanks' nurtured an arts boom throughout the country. Theater audiences more than tripled. Dance audiences increased by a factor of ten. Other measures of the arts showed similar growth. Just as important, artists and government officials came to feel they were full partners in a set of long term endeavors.

Loverd characterizes the ingredients of Hanks' leadership—the “recipe” for implementation—as comprised of four major elements: environmental context, bureaucratic resources, political tactics, and personal style.

In terms of the context, Hanks was relatively non-partisan. Although a Republican, she was acceptable to President Nixon as neither an artist nor a politician. As a “neutral” figure, she was able to build partnerships, i.e. political coalitions, by avoiding any political or artistic labels. Rather, she described herself modestly as a budgeting specialist, an arts administrator who could creatively put a program into a political context. She was adept at partnering: building networks, convening panels of experts, coordinating advisory committee decisions, integrating diverse viewpoints, and reformulating information and opinion into an acceptable, practical product. She has also been described as an individual with great attention to detail and a facility for meticulous preparation.

In addition to her personal characteristics, Hanks defined a long-term financial growth strategy for the agency. Her three goals were:

Cultural resources development, targeting nonprofit arts agencies for competitive grants.

Availability of artistic resources to a much wider audience.

Advancement of our cultural legacy by funding new creative opportunities for artists and new artistic experiences for audiences.

Each of these three was the basis for a new coalition of partners: arts agencies, audiences and artists.

In order to fund these initiatives, Hanks took advantage of the newly passed Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 to secure more than \$10 million in transitional funding. In addition, by developing “challenge grants” as a new category of funding, one, which required a three-to-one match of private to federal dollars, she effectively stretched NEA’s budget. Both actions required substantial coalition building in the arts and political communities, as well as alliance building with other federal agencies such as U.S.I.A. and G.S.A. In order to staff NEA’s initiatives, she built a capable, loyal staff, in large part by drawing upon her wide networks. That staff underscored and reinforced her own capabilities and was very much a fourth partner in building momentum for the arts.

Finally, Hanks became known for results-oriented programs. She often relied on ideas that had been successfully piloted elsewhere, often at the state level. By paying attention to such innovations, she was able to adapt workable ideas rather than risk implementing something entirely new.

Compared to her successors, who were notably less successful, Hanks is viewed as a person with the right qualities and the necessary skills to take advantage of a policy environment that presented opportunities for implementation of public policy. She is known as a leader who worked effectively with a broad range of allies, including bureaucrats in her own agency and in other federal venues, and politicians in the White House and Congress.

Overall, then, we can extract the following guidelines from the Hanks’ case:

1. Build networks, resulting in partnerships.
2. Bring technical expertise to the position.
3. Increase resources and disburse them to partners.
4. Integrate diverse viewpoints.
5. Adapt proven ideas.
6. Demonstrate results.
7. Build a capable, loyal staff as internal partners.
8. Take advantage of opportunities in the policy environment.

The Case of Colin Powell

Nancy Hanks’ had a clear mission, and one in which she ardently believed: growth of the arts. General Colin Powell’s most public implementation task, however, was to implement an even clearer mission, but one that he may not have initially supported, the Persian Gulf War. By all accounts he did so in an unquestionably effective manner. How so?

According to Jon Meacham, Powell reportedly had reservations about going to war against Iraq. As an alternative, he favored a strategy of containment. But Powell’s responsibility, as Chairman of the Joint Chief’s of Staff, was to implement the President’s decision to go to war. By all accounts Powell was adroit in his support of the President, partnering with different players to build a supportive constituency.

Meacham characterizes Powell’s skills as more than technical. In the White House he was considered surprisingly adept politically, and a major player who knew how to work the levers of

power at the departmental and interagency levels. Among members of the press, he was viewed almost as especially cooperative in helping to develop stories, a clear indication of his subtle skillfulness in enlisting the press as a policy implementation partner.

Like Hanks, Powell's attributes include an efficient manner and an ability to get things done. He is an individual firmly committed to the principles of merit, and he attributes his success to the Army's objectivity in assessing the skills and accomplishments of its members: Powell clearly felt that his success in the military was based solely on his performance. That statement alone underscores his awareness of the need to build and maintain support within the military bureaucracy over the long haul, i.e. the course of his career.

By reputation, Powell is characterized, in terms of policy implementation, as by reputation a conservative manager. He is described by Meacham and others as someone who knew how far he could take an argument, and was understandably reluctant to antagonize other decision makers who did not share his understanding of facts, strategies or tactics. But his persuasive abilities enabled him to fight for federal funds for defense, and to prevail. He proved an effective negotiator. In 1990 he took the initiative, convincing President Bush and Defense Secretary Cheney to maintain a "base force" of 1.6 million troops, and overall defense spending of \$290 million. In arguing for those numbers, he used his ties with the press to "float" his own position in advance of that of the White House. He was able to preserve Cold War levels of funding without a Cold War enemy. He did this in part by building a coalition of interests within the Department of Defense, a mutually advantageous strategy of multiple, overlapping forces, thus begging the questions of efficiency and of redundancy and minimizing opportunities for drastic budget cuts.

During the Gulf War, Powell was also as adept as a politician as he was as a military strategist. According to General Schwarzkopf, he was never sure of whether Powell was representing his own views or those of others.

Overall, Powell emerged from the Persian Gulf War as a hero—highly respected and positioned for future leadership. The military had accomplished its mission, and he was perceived as both an effective leader—by his troops and the public—and an effective soldier—by his civilian superiors. He had implemented successfully implemented national policy, largely by recruiting organizational allies and maintaining coalitions, much as he had done in earlier budgetary and intradepartmental "wars."

We can also extract guidelines for successful policy implementation from the Powell case, according to Meacham:

1. Know how to "partner" in the process of implementing desired policy.
2. Become a reliable source for potential press partners.
3. Project an image of efficiency.
4. Advocate principles of merit, thereby building a positive image for the organization.
5. Build both internal and external coalitions.
6. Be able to represent the views of other partners.
7. Argue preemptively, thereby facilitating partnership opportunities.
8. Be willing to implement orders in order to be an "inside" partner.

The Leadership Literature

What implementation insights can we extract from the leadership literature as a whole? Perspectives on leadership are often framed as guides, and a sampling of those distillations may help a policy-level official build a salient overall model of leadership for implementation. For example, in addition to the personal and political attributes emphasized above, John Baldoni, a well known writer on leadership defines six key attributes of leadership messages (http://www.johnbaldoni.com/pdf/baldoni_leadership_speaker.pdf):

Character: effective leadership over the long run should be moral.

Bearing: confidence should emerge from bearing, which is the public presentation of character.

Attitude: optimism holds more potential than pessimism.

Words: the public face of the inner person.

Deeds: a leader is ultimately the sum of his or her accomplishments.

Wisdom: a willingness to look ahead as well as a willingness to be flexible to changing conditions.

Although a distinctly different perspective than each of the two cases above, Baldoni's list offers a complementary perspective on partnering. The attributes he describes not only serve the individual, but also serve to attract and hold the support of superiors, peers, and subordinates who find it attractive and advantageous to be associated with such a leader. If the sum of these six points may be labeled as "charisma," then such charisma may be viewed as a collective signal to potential allies, or partners. Charisma itself will not insure implementation, but by helping to recruit and hold allies that set of attributes will certainly make policy implementation more likely.

Addressing the military, Maureen Leboeuf (1999) defines an alternative philosophy of leadership. It certainly complements the more pragmatic view of General Powell. Leboeuf (30-33) presents a complex view of leadership, and one rooted in abstractions rather than skills or personal chemistry:

Vision: idealistic and a vision of the future organization.

Values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, personal courage.

Care for soldiers/employees: quality of life, proper training and equipment, safety, family support and timely recognition for a job well done.

Leader development. Formal schooling, leader training within the organization, and empowerment.

Managing Change: recognize that change is inevitable and strive to master it; clearly articulate the reasons for change and how it ties into the organization's mission and purpose.

Diversity: value and listen to every member of the organization.

Sense of humor to help build rapport and cooperation.

Much of Leboeuf's list is advice on partnering, especially with the organization's all-important internal partners: soldiers/employees and future leaders. She is suggesting that both abstractions and tangible improvements in their quality of life will build support for a leader's agenda. Her

advice on diversity (#6) is merely that everyone may have something valuable to offer in terms of strengthening the implementation system, and sometimes in terms of avoiding disastrous mistakes. Even the advice as to sense of humor offers help in partnering in terms of personal rapport and spirit of cooperation.

Conclusion

Overall, innovative partnerships between the public and not-for-profit and private sectors, and across agencies, departments, levels and even branches of the government, serve as models for significantly higher levels of accomplishment once we begin to think outside the usual bureaucratic box. Federal, state and local officials need to encourage and support effective partnerships that accomplish government's policy-related goals. When permitted to approach problem solving creatively, public servants can create partnerships toward more productive, more responsive government.

In particular, implementation requires public sector managers who are willing to rethink human resource management. In a society with higher, quality-oriented expectations, the simplistic bureaucratic, hierarchical management style that our culture communicates is insufficient. Yet too many organizations, public and private, fail to intelligently utilize or maintain their expensive human capital. The reason for this is simple: it is difficult and it takes a lot of time and effort. The more enduring, but more difficult, way to implement improved performance is to develop each worker's individual capacity and desire to function at the highest level possible. Employees at all levels are the partners upon which the success of every public organization rests.

The enlightened leadership and management of human resources is particularly important in the public sector because government's most extensive and expensive investments are people; most public organizations devote from fifty to eight-five percent of their budgets to employee salaries and benefits. Because those "human resources" have complicated needs, responsive public organizations have adopted enlightened human resource practices, rejecting an authoritarian, bureaucratic style. Public organizations have often recognized that a productive organization is humane, structured around not only the task but its members and their human needs. They understand that the art of leadership inheres in getting people to work well for the organization by grasping and responding to their needs.

But organizational leaders also understand that intended services are achieved not by isolated individuals working alone and competing with each other, but by teams working cooperatively and supporting their colleagues. Thus, effective leaders recognize that partners within the organization are teams as well as individuals.

It might be tempting to adopt either of the cases above as a model, or either list as well. It might even be tempting to develop a "leadership schematic." But we must caution that this type of schematic cannot and should not be considered a formula for leadership toward implementation. No one model is sufficient or specific to any individual's particular problem-solving situation. Each individual has to form his or her own schematic or roadmap. Each implementation situation will differ in significant ways. Some will necessarily emphasize a certain subset of skills. It would be naïve and misleading to consider each element of equal weight and import. Yet over the long run each is potentially important. At the same time, we must acknowledge that this

picture is incomplete. What is salient will depend on the individual, the situation, the group, the resources, etc. To implement policy effectively one must be willing to search for and adapt insights on leadership; thus, this schematic should differ on an individual basis and should evolve over time.

Leadership, in its simplest formulation as outlined in the first part of this chapter, may be taken as the “born leader.” But few, if any, leaders are born to the job. Even those with the most powerful personal attributes learned such behaviors from family, friends, teachers, and even television and other media. The most effective leaders go beyond the simple prescriptions and assumptions communicated by the culture, and continue to learn about leadership. That learning empowers their ability to implement policies and priorities. For even very busy decision makers, who are so busy implementing public policy that they do not have time to read the heavier texts and journal articles, effective means to learning for leadership may include:

Books: A search of the Web will yield hundreds of titles on leadership. Similarly, a visit to any good bookstore will yield dozens. For example, Montgomery Van Wart has recently written *Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service: Theory and Practice* (2005). Amazon.com lists some fifty books on leadership as bestsellers.

Articles: Short discussions of leadership are widely available in the print and electronic media, particularly in magazines in both formats, and electronic blogs. Searches under the term “leadership” on various search engines produce links to thousands of articles.

Online Resources: Excellent, thoughtful examinations of leadership are available via cases on the Web, such as the Hartwick Classic Film Leadership Cases (www.hartwickinstitute.org/) and the Electronic Hallway (www.hallway.org/). Diverse cases are found on such sites as the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (www.fireleadership.gov/index.html), including its Leadership in Cinema program. Govleaders.com links to a wide range of publications, games and simulations, degrees, institutes, etc.

Leadership resources, in print or video or online, will offer richer, deeper visions of effective leadership. For the most part, those visions run counter to the relatively simplistic, top-down model that so pervades our culture. But perhaps the more thoughtful analyses and reflections on leadership are insufficient guides by themselves to the extent that they are simply overwhelmed by the leadership messages inherent in popular culture and bestselling titles, messages that are built on the lessons of a Patton, an Attila the Hun or a prominent coach. The most effective approach to leadership development may be to deliver sophisticated lessons as part of structured leadership development experiences. For instance, many M.P.A. programs, and in particular Executive M.P.A. programs, offer courses in leadership, as do other degree programs, continuing education courses and public management conferences. Those more thoughtful and structured approaches to the study of leadership, approaches characterized by partnering and collaborative behaviors, may effectively help undo the assumptions or behaviors many managers have subconsciously absorbed but have never consciously questioned.

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