The Realities of Public Sector Management and Leadership

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It’s All About Power

- *Power* and *Influence* are the two critical ingredients/variables that explain how government works, i.e. the capacity and ability to make something happen that would not happen by itself (e.g. compel someone to do something they would not ordinarily do or prevent them doing something they want to do).

- Government is *really* about behavior – the behavior of individuals, groups and organizations and the control of those behaviors.
Leadership - defined

- Management is defined as “the process of working with and through individuals and groups and other resources to accomplish organizational goals.” [Hersey and Blanchard]

- The are differences between ‘management and ‘leadership’
Leadership vs. Management

“Leaders conquer the context – the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seem to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them – while managers surrender to it. The manager administrates, the leader innovates. The manager is a copy, the leader develops. The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people. The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust. The manager has a short-range view, the leader has a long-range perspective. The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why? The manager has a view on the bottom line; the leader has a view on the horizon. The manager initiates, the leader originates. The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it. Managers do things right, leaders do the right things.” [Bennis]
The application of leadership - what does government do? [power]

- It is *Extractive* – it takes from the public (goods, services and resources)

- It is *Distributive* – it gives to the public (goods, services and resources)

- It *Controls/Regulates Behavior* (compels and prevents behavior)
General Observations about Government and Leadership

- Observations and comments about politics and policies: the links between ideas and practice
- Seven observations
Observations

1) definition of politics: "who gets what, when and how"
2) three functions of government: extractive, distributive and regulatory activities [notions of legitimacy and control]
3) what do elected officials do: they decide and they act (they are involved in both policy formulation and policy implementation)
4) it needs to be noted that government is not a single entity or mechanism operating through a uniform apparatus – it encompasses local, county, state, federal and sometimes inter-jurisdictional organizations with different procedures, priorities, interests and influences; in addition, jurisdictions usually operate through three different branches to create a checks and balances system (making management and leadership complex and challenging)
Observations (cont.)

5) *importance of values, norms and ethics* in public policy - they are the foundation for *everything* we do (they change, however, as people's values and perceptions change; they are not static or forever permanent, e.g. employment, capital punishment, voting rights, affordable housing, education opportunities, etc.)

6) public sector management is *different* than private sector management (different structures, different purposes, different incentives, different rules/regulations, different goals)

7) elected officials find themselves in a *political force field* dealing with the internal and external environment and their influences (*internal*: municipal staffs and other elected officials; *external*: regulatory bodies, other governments, media, advocacy groups, special interest groups, the public, et. al.) and the power of the administrator is always limited
Dilemmas/Challenges for Elected Officials

Some special problems facing elected officials:

1) what is the "public good" and how is it defined, implemented and measured? (who benefits and who pays? who wins and who loses?)

2) there is no single overriding goal or objective in government nor is there a single best way to provide services

3) elected officials face a pluralistic constituency with different interests, needs, values and priorities (there is no single 'market' for public services or a single product that can be sold or marketed)

4) government operates through the principles of availability and accessibility of services for all (it cannot deny services to those who qualify based on regulatory criteria)

5) resource allocations when resources are limited/finite and raising revenues through taxes are anathema – *it is about decisions, actions and surviving*
Critical Tasks for Elected Officials

- Decide
- Act
- Survive
Difficulties in Deciding/Acting

Factual Considerations and Conflicts

• Uncertainty and Inability to be Omniscient
• Capacity to Be Wrong/Inaccurate
• “There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know we don’t know.” (Rumsfeld quote)

Normative Considerations and Conflicts: Choices

• Personal Ethics
• Professional Ethics/Regulations
• Societal Ethics/Laws
Challenges to *Deciding/Acting*

- Conceptual capacities and limitations to diagnose and understand the people and organizations that are managed (how do you know your facts are correct, valid, reliable?)

- Making the “right choice” (conflict among “right choices” in government)

- Reality: Your perceptions yield your behavior – this is the basis of how you decide and act [your ‘reality’ in relation to others ‘reality’ – who is correct?]
Challenges (cont.)

• Inability to Control, Impotence and Limits of Authority

• Ability to Navigate Competing Interests

• Creating Precedents, Policies, New Programs/Services, Eliminating Current/Existing Services [a change agent]

• Ability to Balance “organizational interests” [Tasks] and “people interests” [Relationships]
Challenges to Survive

- Ferlinghetti ("Constantly Risking Absurdity and Death . . . ")
- A metaphor for artists, acrobats and leaders . . .
Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
To a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be
For he’s the super realist
who must perforce perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
towards that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits

with gravity

to start her death-defying leap

And he

a little charleychaplin man who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form spreadeagled in the empty air of existence
How to Survive?

- Have a plan/vision for what you want to accomplish
- Be decisive
- Accept responsibility for your decisions
- Be willing to listen and compromise
- Challenge your assumptions about what is correct/fair
- Accept defeat graciously and learn from it
- Respect the people who work for you and acknowledge their contributions
- Remain humble – it is a privilege to serve