



# 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]
- There 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 methaphor 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