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Roundtable on Leadership & Administration

Changing Face of Leadership and Administration in Public Service

A Conversation with Robert J. Lamb, Senior Advisor for Policy, Management, and Budget, U.S. Dept. of the Interior
and David Lewis, Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University

Center for Public Administration & Policy
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

SUMMARY REPORT
October 2005
**Issue for Discussion**

In the public management literature and in seminars and classrooms across the United States, the terms leadership and management are increasingly used interchangeably.

This initial Roundtable explored the overall question of whether leadership and management are the same, or whether there are important distinctions in language and practice that must be understood.

Panelists Robert L. Lamb and David Lewis responded to the following questions during a lengthy discussion of theory and practice:

- What does it mean for managers to lead?
- What does leadership look like in action?
- How can leadership capacity at the individual and organizational level be developed?
- And what will be the demands for leadership in the future?

**Guest Panelists**

The forum was moderated by Colleen Woodard, Visiting Professor, Center for Public Administration and Policy, and featured a renowned panel composed of Robert J. Lamb, Senior Advisor for Policy, Management, and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior; and David Lewis, Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University.

**Robert J. Lamb**

*Senior Advisor for Policy, Management, and Budget*

*U.S. Department of the Interior*

Mr. Lamb was Senior Advisor for Policy, Management and Budget with the U.S. Department of the Interior. He joined the federal government in 1971 as a human resource specialist at the National Institutes of Health. In all, he served in public service for more than thirty years, serving as the Interior Department’s Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget and Finance, as the Director of Budget, as the Acting Chief Information Officer and as the Acting
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Workforce Diversity.

His work focused on advancing the capacity of DOI and its employees to build more effective network of partnerships with public, non-profit, and private organizations and citizens to accomplish the agency’s mission of conservation and stewardship.

Mr. Lamb played a major role in designing and organizing a recent White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation. Only the fourth White House conference in the nation’s history to deal with conservation issues, this event focused on ways to improve the environment by expanding locally-led conservation efforts through expanded partnerships and collaboration. The conference drew over twelve hundred leaders of public, private, and non-profit organizations and citizens from around the country.

He earned a bachelor of arts degree in Philosophy from the University of Dayton, a master of arts degree from Johns Hopkins University, and an MBA from George Washington University.

David Lewis  
Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs  
Woodrow Wilson School  
Princeton University

A recent issue of GOVEXEC.com featured a report entitled Political Appointments, Bureau Chiefs and Federal Management Performance written by Professor Lewis. The report used the Bush Administration’s Program Assessment Rating Tool scores to compare the performance of bureau chiefs who are politically appointed to those who are appointed from within the civil service.

As quoted in Government Exec, “a new report from Princeton University finds that career federal managers do a better job of running their agencies than their politically appointed counterparts.” In sum, more experience within the bureau they manage, and longer tenure seems to provide more tangible results.

Professor Lewis is Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Princeton University and the Woodrow Wilson School. He previously held a faculty position with the College of William and Mary.


Professor Lewis is a graduate of Stanford’s Political Science Ph.D. program. He earned his master of arts degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a bachelor of arts degree in Political Science from Berkeley.

Dr. Colleen Woodard  
Roundtable Moderator  
CPAP Visiting Professor

As a Visiting Professor, Dr. Woodard teaches personnel and budgeting courses for CPAP. She has taught in other universities across the National Capital Region.

She is CEO and Consulting Director of Federal Technology Services, Inc. FTS provides independent consultation in
Human Resources Management and Training.

Dr. Woodard has 30 years’ experience as a HRM professional in the federal government, including serving as the director of HRM for the US Patent and Trademark Office.

In 1995 she pursued her Ph.D. with CPAP and received her degree in 2000.

In her written and professional work she has become increasingly interested in the question of leadership in the public service, and it is her passion for this topic that is driving our efforts to build a Roundtable series around the topic.

Introduction

The Roundtable discussion aimed at finding answers to the questions of whether we could differentiate between leadership and management, or whether we should even attempt to make a distinction.

In his opening remarks, Bob pointed out that since he works for the Department of Interior, on his way to Virginia Tech, and while admiring the GW Parkway, he thought of the small role he plays in that beautiful scene, given that the Parkway is managed by the National Parks Service. He proudly stated that it “affirmed what a wonderful thing a career in civil service can be and how valuable it is.”

His very first assignment as a public servant at HEW, he was called to define leadership. When hiring workers, how do you find people? He expressed that shadowing experiences, such as participating in CPAP’s Praxis, are really invaluable. In his career, he believes, he has been blessed for having unusual jobs, and adds, I discovered in the Interior Department that you never know it all.”

In a White house conference where he participated a couple of years ago, he came to the conclusion that the Interior Department, and other agencies, will never have all the resources it needs. Agencies need a different skill set, they need to worry within the workforce to develop skills that lead to greater partnerships because the answers rest in alliances and partnerships with others who share the same values.

Dave noted that it is really difficult to distinguish leaders from managers. Nevertheless, while a correlation exists between the two, he pointed out that there clearly are differences between the two. In his view, it is much easier to teach management than to teach leadership. Part of that is that leadership is in some senses person-specific and sometimes experiential. Some people have different endowments in leadership or have had experiences that bring out leadership characteristics, whereas management is often about skills that can be taught. “I think that people can all be improved in their management abilities; teaching people how to be good leaders is a tricky business” he noted. “As academics we struggle with that”. He presented survey results that suggest that managers with MPP/MPA academic background were not rated as highly as leaders as managers by their employees’ perceptions of leadership.

Bob interjected by arguing that it is important to know what the focus is in such type of surveys. From his own experience with a survey based on employees’

Future public servants must “protect the [public sector’s] honor and integrity”

Robert J. Lamb, Senior Advisor for Policy, Management, and Budget, Department of the Interior
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Robert J. Lamb,
Senior Advisor for Policy, Management, and Budget, Department of the Interior

Lessons from the Private Sector

The next point treated at the table was the emphasis on a business model in the public sector, and the aspects that the public leader/manager could learn from the private sector in building leadership capacity.

To the question of what can the public manager learn from the private manager, Dave suggested that some things could be usefully brought from the private sector. In the changing federal work environment, he found that efforts in management reform in particular areas have been useful. He cited attempts to get perfect information to use in the budgeting process, asserting that it is better to know than not to know, and highlighted the importance of assessing what we think a program should be doing, versus what the programs actually are doing. Part of process is asking what we should be doing, and this is a useful process imported from the private sector. Also, he considered it useful to decide whether the government should make a product or project or buy it, for the sake of efficiency.

The private sector, David noted, does a better job in recruiting and retaining employees. Compared to the not so effective personnel system in the government: “People don’t know where to go to find [a government] job”. He argued that a serious retention problem would arise in the future, as a lot of people retire. In this light, importing strategies from the private sector can be useful.

Dispersion of Public Sector Work

The next point of discussion was related to today’s dispersion of public sector work: Power being shared across governments, sectors, organizations, contractors, etc. How does this growing dispersion impact the practice of leadership?

Dave suggested that given the changing environment in the public sector, power shared among governments, and non-profits, he believed that the skills that we need to learn include negotiation, as it is important that a public officer knows how to negotiate. Public communication is also important since we need to communicate down and out to the people we are trying to cooperate with, and also to the press. Otherwise, he suggested, “things can get quickly out of control”.

He underscored the distinct public aspect of the public sector. He prescribed that one needs to understand the strategic environment in which one works. Contrary to long ago, the modern civil service is characterized by much more permeability, which creates problems for cultivating leaders. Another problem is that agencies have very different and specific personnel systems, which require a specific knowledge for managers and make things even more complicated.

The question of other changes occurring in the practice of leading and managing in the public organizations was addressed by Dave, who pointed out that skills have also been changing. “Federal government work is more complex. Special skills are required: econometrics, IT, legal, rule making
The modern civil service is characterized by a lot more permeability, which creates problems for cultivating leaders.

David Lewis, 
Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University

process”. He emphasized that this is not only true for employees but also for managers: how can you manage or lead “if you do not understand what the people below you are doing?”

Developing Leadership Competencies

Next, the topic of developing leadership competencies versus management competencies was touched on.

Dave explained that an important part of cultivating effective leaders, is “doing MPA stuff” and studying public management. These can help to make effective managers, as well as programs of shadowing, and direct bureau experience. He believes that previous experience does improve the chances of succeeding, which include experiential learning of internships and working with people: “Difficulties arise when coming from the outside”.

The discussion turned to describing a model that would capture the competencies people need to be effective leaders in public offices, departments, programs, teams and how one could develop those competencies.

Bob advised that “whatever you do, don’t manage the way your predecessor managed.” He made the distinction that leadership is how you get the job done, and management is what you get done. He encouraged people to find their own comfort zone where one is to lead effectively and really play on those strengths. “You can’t change yourself easily” his advice was that “the leadership model you are looking for is not outside, it is within and gain experience”. He added that we must have a vision but also we need to help translate it to employees to what the mission means for them and the tasks they are called to perform.

Conclusions

Dave suggested that part of what defines leadership is when people in the organization want to follow. The difference between a leader and a manager, he added, is that “people want to do what you want and what you have told them to do”. Why would people want to follow somebody? This is what distinguishes management from leadership. It’s about people themselves: “wherever this person takes me is where I want to go”. In the background there is a power thing, one can coerce, bargain or exert moral authority to make people believe that what a leader decides is the right thing to do.

Bob did not encourage commanding but rather engaging in participation: “Engage, ask people what they think”.

Dave reinforced the idea that departments do not have all the resources they require, and thus the need for cooperation. Effective leaders in public sector persuade other people to cooperate and work together when the interest of the other actors does not lead them to participate. Skills required to lead effectively are among others, persuasion cooperation and negotiation. He advised us to put ourselves in our counterpart shoes and try to understand where they are coming from. This will lead to bridging the
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changing public environment. He repeats again that one must understand the environment one is working with, and the political process. Public communication has an important role, in an era where face-to-face meetings are not always possible. Knowing how to communicate what one wants to accomplish and making people want to cooperate, are crucial.

When addressing the question of how to manage employees without micromanagement, Bob summarized it saying that “it all comes down to trust”. He pursued by saying that for anyone working in public sector, there are several attributes that are essential, the most important being integrity since this is what the public and political appointees expect. He called for future public servants to “protect the [public sector’s] honor and integrity”.

Resources on Leadership and Administration