The Future of Public Administration

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Abstract

This paper examines several trends likely to affect the field of public administration over the coming two decades. Implications of these trends for the internal management of public organizations and for the relationship between public officials and citizens are considered. It becomes apparent that new skills and abilities will be required for public servants of the future.

In this article, I would like to explore some of the conditions under which public managers will operate in the future, some of the areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they will be required to possess, and some of the pathways public managers might explore in order to move toward that future. I will begin by suggesting five challenges that will likely face the top public managers of the next century, challenges that will affect all sectors of society, but that will be of particular importance to those in the public service. I will then examine two important directions that public administration will likely take in the future.

First, let us examine some of the trends that will affect the field of public administration over the coming decades. In each case, I will state the trend rather broadly, but I will restrict my comments to the implications for the public service. I would suggest the following: 1) An extraordinary explosion of <u>new knowledge and technological innovations</u>, especially in the areas of information sciences, genetics, materials, instrumentation, automation, and space. This point is so obvious that initially it may appear trite. But I want to suggest two aspects of this problem or this opportunity that make it important for public managers.   First, there is no question that we live in an age of extraordinary technological change. Twenty five years ago, the computing power that now sits on your desk or even in your lap required several air conditioned rooms. If we merely extrapolate that same progress in terms of size and computing capacity, twenty five years from now we might expect computers the size of a wrist watch, the size of a small coin that you could carry in your pocket, or a the size of a microscopic chip that could be implanted in your head.

Think what capacities and resources for knowledge and information such a computer would allow. And if in turn you think of linking that same computer to a similarly enhanced "Internet", imagine what possibilities there might be for instantaneous interpersonal and international communications. We will in any case have to accommodate ourselves and our institutions to dramatically different bodies of knowledge and technological innovations.

A related point is that we will not only have to cope with and employ our expanded knowledge and technological capacity, we will have to learn to use this knowledge and technological capacity for the benefit rather than the destruction of society. In the technological world of the future, there will be even greater temptations for us to be captured by technology, to fall prey to what Jacques Ellul called the "technological imperative," and to allow rational technical interests to supercede human concerns and those of values. For those in the public service, finding ways of employing advanced technologies so as to enhance rather than restrict our capacity for leadership, creativity, and personal responsibility will be a serious challenge. And that leads to a second trend.

2) Changing institutional patterns resulting from the emergence of post-industrial economies and structures of governance based on information, knowledge, and services. In the future, even more than today, knowledge and information will prevail. And if knowledge is power, then those who have knowledge will indeed have power. But who will have knowledge? We can imagine two possible scenarios. The first is that knowledge will be increasingly centralized and controlled and marketed through traditional economic and political processes. A second and more hopeful possibility is that knowledge will be widely distributed throughout society, so that increasing rather than decreasing numbers of people will have knowledge and in turn have power. Harlan Cleveland has suggested that such a possibility will lead to "the twilight of hierarchy," something which he holds to be inevitable. But the choice still remains.

In any case, when we combine this issue with the first, we can safely predict that the knowledge or information that we will be able to access will be tremendous, to the point that the quantity of information will no longer be the most important issue. Rather the key question will be how to organize this information for human purposes. In the case of public service, this means that we will have to learn to organize information in a fashion

that will facilitate the pursuit of important public purposes.   Again, one would expect that organizing information for technically rational purposes or for the purposes of hierarchical control will be relatively easy, as it always has been. But the greater challenge will be to organize information so that we can enhance the process of democratic decision-making, of consensus building, and of dialogue and deliberation.

There's no question that we will have the capacity to organize information for dramatic new public purposes, to restructure our structures of governance in dramatic ways. But what will our choices be? For many years, as a classroom illustration of direct versus representative democracy, I have asked students to imagine a computer in the nation's capital that could reach out into every home, so that on any occasion that a major policy decision was required, an appropriate message could go out to all the citizens and their answers could guide public policy - a process that would approximate pure democracy.

There's no question that such a possibility is within our reach technologically.   Correspondingly, there's really no longer any <u>practical</u> reason not to have a purer form of participation than we have today. But do we want one?   And would that alone help establish a more democratic society?

Certainly involving citizens in every decision raises important questions. Most obviously, how do you assure that an appropriate level of expertise is incorporated into the decision process? How can you be sure that the fullest and most complete knowledge is brought to bear on the problems of state? How can you make sure that the electronically skilled majority won't trample the computer illiterate minority? And, perhaps most important, how can you incorporate the requirement of dialogue and deliberation that has always been considered an essential element of democracy?   These are just some of the questions that we will need to address as we evolve new structures of governance for the next century.

3) The <u>increasing integration and globalization</u> of business, politics, culture, and environmental concerns. The globalization of society is obvious today, though in twenty five years or so, we may experience trans-globalization or beyond, as the frontiers of the oceans and space are extended even further. Already we are thinking more in global terms. However, it's also fair to say that we are still thinking in terms of traditional institutions operating in a

new global context. That is, we are asking: How does a business operate in a global economy? How does a government act globally? We are not yet asking how we reconfigure businesses and governments so as to carry out a global vision. How do we encourage businesses and governments to assume global responsibilities rather than those defined in terms of one's own self interest? For example, how can we move toward sustainable development and environmental justice on a global basis?

One obvious casualty of the global age may be the nation-state, replaced not necessarily replaced by a new global or interplanetary federation but possibly by new forms of governance far beyond those we can imagine today. Indeed, to some extent that may be necessary, as we attempt to balance local, or even what the post-modernists call "tribal" integrity with the global scope of economic and environmental issues.
This trend takes on increased importance as we recognize that over the past several years there has been a rebirth of interest in the notion of community - on all sides of the political spectrum. On the one hand, those on the left see community as an antidote to the excessive and unrestrained greed and self-interest that seems to mark modern society. Meanwhile, those on the right see community as an avenue to restore basic values now being challenged by forces outside our control. In either case, community has become a dominant theme in contemporary life. And while we will return to this theme momentarily, for now we should simply note the potential conflict between the notion of community and globalization or between local communities and a global community.

But let us also note that at the same time we experience globalization we will also experience integration. In part, integration will be hierarchical and raise the specter of massive domination and control. But in addition I expect that we will see new sectors of society interacting in new and innovative ways , for example, through the establishment of policy networks comprised of diverse groups (business, government, etc.) engaged together in the steering of society. As such an integration occurs, government and business may indeed become less distinguishable as the lines between them blur and functions move back and forth between what we once called the public and private sectors. But if this is the case it makes even more important the task of identifying exactly what are the core responsibilities of government and how we can develop and maintain new systems of democratic governance to carry out those responsibilities.

In such a decade, we would suggest the importance of talking about "responsibilities" rather than "functions" of government. While a large part of the current world-wide debate over privatization or contracting out speaks to the question of which "functions" belong where, in our view, the new debate will necessarily focus on public responsibilities and speak in a language of ethics, citizenship and the public interest. This is certainly not to say that those in government should adopt the practices or values of business - indeed, there are some dangers in doing so, some that we are seeing already. Public administrators are familiar with the old admonition that government be run like a business. But many of the contemporary efforts to "reform" the management of government have gone well beyond adopting the practices or <u>techniques</u> of business management. Instead, what is sometimes called the "reinvention" movement or at other times called the "new public management" seems to have accepted a wide variety of business <u>values</u>, for example, the imperative of self-interest, the value of competition, the sanctity of the market, and respect for the entrepreneurial spirit. Under these circumstances, we should indeed ask about questions like participation, deliberation, leadership, expertise, responsibility, justice, equity, etc. In the United States, the Bible of the reinvention movement is the book <u>Reinventing Government</u>. But if you check the index of that book, you'll find not a single one of these terms - not justice, not equity, not participation, not even leadership. And you won't find either "citizens" or "citizenship."

We find it peculiar that governmental reform could be discussed in such a substantial and influential way without suggesting any active role whatever for citizens or citizenship. Instead, in reinvented government or the new public management, citizens have been replaced by customers - or, to put it differently, the integrative role of citizenship has been reduced to the narrow self-interest of customership - in government as in business.

4) Demographic and socio-cultural shifts toward more and more <u>diversity and potential conflicts</u>. We have already introduced this issue by referring to the concern for maintaining diversity within the wholeness we desire from the idea of community. John Gardner has written eloquently on this point suggesting that "the 'common good' is first of all preservation of a system in which all kinds of people can - within the law - pursue their various visions of the common good, and at the same time accomplish the kinds of mutual accommodation that make a social system livable and

workable.   The play of conflicting interests in a framework of shared purposes is the drama of a free society."

It's always been harder to govern a pluralist society than to manage a homogeneous one, but that is the challenge that public servants in the future will face. Indeed, we think the job of all public servants, including public administrators, will increasingly be more than directing or managing our public organizations. The job will be not merely "steering" or "rowing" but "building the boat." The new public manager will construct groups or networks of varied interests that can work effectively to solve public problems.   In doing so, it will be the job of the public administrator to promote pluralism, to create opportunities for constructive dissent, to preserve that which is distinctive about individuals and groups, and to provide an opportunity for diverse groups to share in establishing future directions for the community. The administrator will play a substantial role in diminishing polarization, teaching diversity and respect, building coalitions, resolving disputes, negotiating and mediating. The work of the top public managers will be clear - to build community.

5) <u>An erosion of confidence in traditionally structured institutions</u> to cope with the consequences of these challenges. Already this phenomenon is reaching crisis proportions around the world. In the United States, where thirty years ago some seventy-five per cent of the people trusted the government to do the right thing, today that number is less than twenty-five per cent. What's more there is a similar erosion of confidence in other social institutions - business, labor, the media, and even religion.

I suspect that a part of the problem is an issue of alienation - that is, meaningless or isolation - that people feel major social institutions are out of control, that they are being run by people we don't know and people whose values seem to be quite different from our own. But the notion of inauthenticity may also be helpful.   Let us say that "A relationship, institution, or society is inauthentic if it provides the appearance of responsiveness while the underlying conditions is alienating.   While espousing one belief, the individual or the institution "acts" on another, yet is unaware of, or disregards, this apparent contradiction." The inauthentic institution like the inauthentic individual does not "know itself," or in more contemporary language, "it just doesn't get it."

At the individual level, the pressures of modern society have probably caused many to act in ways inconsistent with their beliefs and values, and, perhaps, to do so without any real recognition of what's they were doing. At the institutional level, there are certainly instances in which governments have said one thing and done another.   But the same charge of inauthenticity has been directed at others - at business men and women who claimed to follow an ethic of social responsibility then engaged in insider trading schemes solely for their own benefit; at organized labor, which has claimed to battle for the rights of the workers, yet has been found to sometimes be more concerned with building the empires of its leaders; and even at churches and religious institutions that proclaimed the moral high ground, yet refused to get involved in practical struggles for peace and justice. Increasingly, it seems that individuals and institutions, "just don't get it."

These conditions of alienation and inauthenticity are, of course, not ignored by our children, but in fact become a part of their world. We would expect that those growing up in a society where alienation and inauthenticity prevail would develop substantial mistrust of social institutions and that they would have great doubts and suspicions about other people. Indeed, the most recent U. S. survey on this point shows an alarming decrease in the trust Americans have for one another.   People no longer know those around them and they are suspicious of what others may do. While thirty years ago a solid majority of Americans believed that most people could be trusted, today two thirds believe that people can <u>not</u> be trusted. If people don't trust one another, then it's not so surprising that they don't trust their institutions, including government.

Given these five trends that will shape our movement toward the future, what will public administrators need to know? What will they need to be able to do? And what attitudes and values should they possess?

Let us suggest two broad areas that public managers will need to explore in order to fashion a response to the trends. In our view, these emerging trends will turn public management both "inside-out" and "upside-down."   Public management will be turned "inside-out" as the largely internal focus of management in the past is replaced by an external focus, specifically a focus on citizens and citizenship. Public management will be turned "upside-down" as the traditional top-down orientation of the

field is replaced - not necessarily by a bottom-up approach, but by a system of shared leadership.

Inside-out - In the past public administration has been largely focused on what happens within the public bureaucracy - not exclusively by any means, but primarily. The future will require that we dramatically re-focus our attention on the world outside, particularly the world of citizens and citizenship.

A project of Orange County, Florida (the local government in the county surrounding Orlando) provides an excellent example of how government can respond to these concerns. That project, called "Citizens First!", talks about a two-way street between citizens and government. On the one hand, people acting as citizens must assume personal responsibility for what happens in their neighborhoods and their communities. And, on the other hand, to the extent that people are willing to assume the role of citizens, those in government must be willing to listen - and to put the needs and values of citizens first.

The idea of "Citizens First!" starts with a distinction between customers and citizens. When people act as customers they tend to take one approach; when they act as citizens they take another. Basically, customers focus on their own limited desires and wishes and how they can be expeditiously satisfied. Citizens, on the other hand, focus on the common good and the long term consequences to the community. The idea of "Citizens First!" is to encourage more and more people to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens and for government to be especially sensitive to the voices of those citizens - not merely through elections but through all aspects of the design and implementation of public policy.

Despite the obvious importance of constantly improving the quality of public sector service delivery, we are increasingly uncomfortable with the notion that government should first or exclusively respond to the selfish, short term interests of "customers." In some ways, the idea just doesn't fit. Certainly the "customers" of government are much harder to define than the customers of the local hamburger stand. In fact, it is often because the interests of various "customers" are in opposition that government is called upon to act in the first place. And of course there are some instances in which "customers" of government simply don't want the service government provides - like traffic tickets. Most important, in the private

sector, those customers with the most money and most influence are accorded special treatment by the market. Such an approach would be ludicrous as public policy.

In our view, citizens cannot be reduced to customers without grave consequences for the notion of democratic citizenship. But if we focus on rebuilding the relationship between government and its citizens, we go to the heart of the public interest. Many people today don't trust government, but that's not just because it doesn't work well. That could be cured by improvements in efficiency - and interestingly that's just what the new public management is trying to do - to increase trust by increasing making governments that "work better and cost less." I question whether that will be enough. The real reason people don't trust government is because they don't see government as being responsive, especially with respect to matters of ethics and integrity. To restore the confidence of citizens in government, public institutions must appear to be responsive. And the best way to appear to be responsive is to be responsive.

This conclusion has tremendous implications for public managers. Where traditionally government has responded to needs by saying "yes, we can provide that service" or "no, we can't," this new approach suggests that elected officials and managers should respond to the ideas of citizens not just by saying "yes" or "no," but by saying such things as "Let's work together to figure out what we're going to do, then to make it happen." In a world of active citizenship, public officials will increasingly play more than a service delivery role - they will play a conciliating, a mediating, or even an adjudicating role. And, we might add, these new roles will require new skills - not the old skills of management control, but new skills of brokering, negotiating and conflict resolution.

Upside-down - The five trends we outlined earlier suggest the possibility of a significantly more centralized and controlled existence. Indeed, as we have said, that will probably be the easy path to follow. The more difficult - but in my mind the proper course - is the opposite. That is, to operate our public organizations so that they release energy that might be employed in the pursuit of greater caring, compassion, and creativity. To do so, we will have to revise our patterns of public organization and indeed our patterns of governance in dramatic ways. For public managers the old top-down form of management will no longer work. It will be seen both internally and externally as alienating and inauthentic. Think of the

language we use to talk about management. In our view, soon certain words will no longer be a part of the vocabulary of public administration. One such word is the word "boss," a word that already strikes me as an anachronism. In fact, I'm not even sure that the term "manager" will much longer be appropriate.

We will instead be entering into a period in which the conduct of public organizations will increasingly be executed through patterns of teamwork and shared leadership. What we will require is a new way of thinking about leadership. In the past, leadership was closely tied to power and position. Those who sought to lead first tried to secure a position of power or influence, then to direct and control those "below" them in the organization or society. The language of leadership was decidedly authoritarian in tone, emphasizing controlling and directing the actions, if not indeed the very lives of others.

We are already moving away from that old image of leadership. The more contemporary view focuses not merely on the leader, but on clusters of people working together and growing together. Leadership is seen as a process of development, a function that operates within a group, an activity in which all can and indeed must engage. We can describe this new form of leadership in an academic definition, but then a one word definition. Leadership occurs where the action of one member of a group of organization stimulates others to more clearly recognize their previously latent needs, desires, and potentialities and to work together toward their fulfillment. Leadership "energizes." Whether a person carries the title of leader or not, if they energize the group, they are exercising leadership.

Traditionally, the leader was expected 1) to come up with good ideas about the direction the group should take, 2) to decide on a course of action or a goal to be accomplished, and 3) to exert his or her influence or control in moving the group in that direction. Sometimes it actually worked - probably because the group was energized. But often as leadership dissolved into control, the situation fell apart. And the political and organizational landscape is littered with those who sought to control rather than to energize.

The more contemporary and the future leader will be the one who 1) helps the group or organization understand its needs and potential, 2) integrates and articulates the group's vision, and 3) acts as a trigger or

stimulus for group action. And the leader will not just be the boss or the manager; the leader will necessarily be everyone.

Given these reflections, how can we direct our current efforts in a way that will properly lay the groundwork for the future of public administration. We think the answer is made simpler if we only recall the task of public administration laid out by the earliest theorists and practitioners in our field - "to make democracy suitable for modern conditions." That's exactly the task we need to set for ourselves as we move toward the future - "to make democracy suitable for modern conditions."

Let me quickly suggest five items that I think will put us on the right path. First, public administrators should fully support those efforts that extend democracy, both in the sense of extending civic involvement and participation and in the sense of asserting the values of democracy. That is, public administration should return to its roots in a commitment to making democracy suitable for modern conditions. Now that's not always easy. In fact, public agencies have well-developed though often well-concealed tendencies to insulate themselves from the public. But a new sense of responsibility for making democracy work implies a new attitude toward involving the public and toward extending the values of democratic governance.

Second, as democratic citizenship expands, public administrators must recognize the new roles that they must play with respect to the public. For example, the "Citizens First!" project in Orange County suggests a new position for public officials, both elected and appointed, a role in which they are intimately involved in understanding citizens' needs and interests and in finding ways to address community problems. The top public managers in the future will not do much controlling, but they will do a lot of negotiating, bargaining, supporting, resolving, exploring, creating, and, most of all, caring.

Third, public administrators should lead the way in developing more democratic forms of organization and management. Ideas like "empowerment" are being bandied about widely by best-selling authors today. As a management practice, empowerment or shared leadership seems to have much to recommend it - though in truth few companies or agencies are really trying it. But empowerment is not an incidental

management technique in the public sector; it is an integral part of the mission of public institutions. In my view, <u>by definition</u>, democratic governments and all of their associated institutions must seek to empower both employees and clients.

On this issue, as in areas of ethics and social responsibility, public administrators should play a leading role in establishing democratic institutions throughout society. In these areas, contrary to what Woodrow Wilson and others have said about government operating like a business, we should hope that, with respect to such ideas as empowerment, ethics, and social responsibility, more businesses would come to operate like governments.

Fourth, those involved in the study and practice of public administration *education* should attend to the integration of theory and practice, reflection and action, the university and the community. Those in colleges and universities around the world are finding new ways of bringing together faculty, staff, and students in a total environment that fosters mutual learning. What we hope to add to this mixture of theory and practice is a strong commitment to the ethics of public service and, specifically, a view of public administration as a moral and ethical undertaking directly related to the maintenance and expansion of democratic citizenship.

Fifth, throughout our work in the preparation for and practice of public administration, we must give full attention to our own special citizenship role, our role as public servants. As we have talked with public managers around the world, we are struck time and again by the commitment of these managers and those in their organizations to the idea of *public service.* These are people who were not turned on by greed or self-interest. They are motivated by their wanting to make a difference; in fact they were inspired by their vision of a better future for all.

We've been through a time in which public administration in many countries has been attacked by politicians and by journalists and best-selling writers for failing to correct all the ills of society. But public administrators can take great pride in what they have been able to accomplish over the years. Although those in the business community seem to receive better press, those in public organizations around the world can claim great credit for protecting the environment, eliminating discrimination, providing for

the public health, helping those in need, and assisting in thousands of other areas. Unlike those in the private sector, public servants are concerned not only with saving money but saving lives; they are concerned not with increasing profit, but with increasing good. Such efforts should be a source of pride to all involved as well as to the public we serve.

Over the coming decades, public administrators will live in a far more complex world and be required to operate under quite different circumstances. Their role will become a far more difficult one, taking them far outside the boundaries of their own organizations and involving them with community groups of all types, all (hopefully) working together to create improved conditions in society. In such a world, leadership will be widely distributed and will reside in the capacity of individuals and groups to "energize" others. In such an effort, we suspect that those in public administration will continue to be energized themselves by the high and noble calling of public service.

Appendix
Skills of the Future Public Administrator

What will the top public managers of the future need to be able to do? In my view, tomorrow's public managers will require a new set of skills and abilities including (though not limited to) the following:

\#   Leadership and associated skills of deliberation - teamwork, problem-solving, negotiation, mediation, cooperation and decision-making in multi cultural settings

\#   Communications skills - written, oral, graphic/technological (including computer skills) and foreign languages

\#   Information gathering, analysis, and evaluation skills

\#   Critical, creative, and ethical reasoning skills

\#   Human relations skills essential for achieving success in a culturally diverse and rapidly changing world

\#   Commitment to physical, psychological, and emotional wellness

\# Appreciation of the diversity of human experience, including the role of aesthetic and creative activities

\# Behavior that accords with the ethical principles and civic virtues of the good and responsible citizen of the local community, the state, the nation, and the world

\# Critical, creative, and ethical thinking abilities

\# Interpersonal, intra-group, inter-group relationship skills essential for achieving success in complex world