
Civic Nutrition, Citizen Empowerment, and Civil Communities

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Abstract

The next job for public administration and the field's related associations is to ensure the civic nutrition that is necessary for our communities to thrive. Law enforcement cannot enforce unless citizens respect the law; schools cannot educate when children are shooting each other; government cannot provide services without adequate resources; civil relationships do not develop in the absence of respect for one another. My remarks focus attention on local government and civic values, arguing for public administration's role in elevating citizen awareness and empowerment.

Governing is an Optimistic Enterprise. If government is nothing more, it is the embodiment of faith and hope: faith that by joining together we can improve our quality of life; hope that tomorrow will be better than today, that the lives of our children will be better than the lives of our parents. In this context, faith and hope become manifest in a monetary system, a free market economy, adherence to the rule of law, defense at the national level and police protection at the local level, constitutional protection of individual liberties, public education and reliable public works and roads.

As public administrators, we are the hands and feet of that faith and hope. We deliver public services and breathe life into public policy. Yet we exist in a strange plane, suspended between the formal powers of elected officials and the cacophony of millions of voices, each focused on individual concerns.

As a profession, we are the translators who explain who gets what in real time and real terms. We are the IRS, who must make sense out of reams of tortured statutes and occasionally stumble in the process. We are the State Department trying to make sense of the new world order while cleaning up remnants of bombed out embassies. We are the FBI, in search

of a fugitive who bombed a medical clinic, killing and maiming in the name of Christian righteousness. We are state officials who take oaths to uphold the Constitution while the Governor of Alabama claims that the Constitution does not necessarily apply to his state. Is this surreal or what?

Americans' love/hate relationship with government persists. With a paranoid right, a forlorn left, and the rest seeking a middle ground, consensus is difficult to build and trustworthy government is an oxymoron to many. Will tomorrow make more sense than today? What will be our charge in the future if today provides the historical backdrop for tomorrow? Government is a tool, not an end -- like a hammer, it can build and it can destroy. Our challenge is to use it to build, to establish justice, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. Even in the midst of irony, the enterprise of governing is an optimistic one.

Federalism to Localism: Public Administration Adjusts to a Post-Modern Environment. Our charge today is to address where the profession has been, where it is going, and how it should get there. There are three concepts that I will lace into my response: *civic nutrition*, which is the name I give to the necessary elements that nurture healthy, safe communities; *citizen empowerment*, which involves individual participation in the governance process; and *civil communities*, which is required if the American style of democracy is to be successful and the spirit of the Constitution is to be preserved. I want to highlight these points because they form the basis for a deliberative citizenry and a way of thinking about government that can mark the transition from our postmodern "in between" era to the *global village*, sagely predicted by Marshall McLuhan (1964) over thirty years ago. To link these in accord with our charge, I will talk about how they affect the practice of public administration, public management, or whatever else you choose to call that which we do.

The future is told by our past. Lest we get trapped by the myopia of the times, it is worth noting that the more things change, the more they stay the same. We find our anchors in our past -- the past of ages ago, centuries ago, decades ago, generations ago, years ago. For example, do you know why railroad tracks are 62" from rail to rail? Because that is the width that has become the standard for those who manufacture railcars, right? Do you know why that width is the standard? Because 62" was the distance

between the wheels on Roman Chariots! When European roads were built originally, the Romans built to suit their needs. One development led to another and today we live with a decision made ages ago -- our railroads still accommodate Roman Chariots. As we move forward we move from our past to our future, but we rarely leave the past totally behind. We are more likely to change the carriage than change the width of its wheel base.

Charles Lindblom (1959) was right when he said we move forward incrementally, making small adjustments. Then, one day, we turn around, look behind, and see that we have made so many minor adjustments that our end state is dramatically different. That is what is happening in health policy, for example. The Clinton health reform plan was rejected by Congress largely because it sounded too different from the system Americans had come to know. Yet, minor changes starting in the 1970's have now progressed to such a point that most physicians are employed by health care organizations, most employees are told which providers they may see, and physicians are now appealing to government (their former arch enemy) for regulations that will control the activities of their employers, the HMOs. We have come so far, but we hardly realized it.

In an age when the Internet makes it easy to communicate with people around the globe and to make quick decisions, we find ourselves legislating programs at the local level and disregarding the economies of scope that can be achieved by centralization. At a time when we talk of America's pluralism, we find a return to neighborhood schools, a continuation of segregated housing patterns, and insistence on doing things "my way" not "your way."

I suggest that we look backward in order to move forward. Almost fifty years ago, Dwight Waldo suggested that "the history we experience is the result of the ideals we pursue" (Waldo, 1952, p. 99). A few years earlier, Paul Appleby (1945) had reminded us that the work of public administrators is to make a "mesh" of things. Arguing that government is broader than any other enterprise and inextricably driven by politics, the skills required of public officials extend far beyond basic management and concerns about efficiency. These insights provide guidance for our future.

Our enchantment with customer-driven government is waning. Public administration reforms during the latter half of the Twentieth Century relied on the promise of scientific management. They have

reached their logical conclusion in the "government reinventions" that have resulted in downsizing, privatization, and reengineered processes. However, the attempt to apply business practices to government has created an imperfect fit where it matters most, which is the interface between citizen responsibility and entitlement. Reformers in the early part of this century viewed government as an instrument for achieving community purposes, for securing more security and equality -- notions that return to the forefront today as our enchantment with "customer-driven government" wanes under the light of the day.

The lifeblood of American communities rests not so much in science and high tech discoveries but in the civic nutrition that is provided by citizens acting in concert with government to build and maintain healthy, safe communities. To this subject I now turn.

Civic Nutrition

Local communities are enjoying a resurgence of attention as we come to realize that, just as all politics is local, all government is local. As the federal government continues to shed itself of programs in order to cut expenses, the growth in government continues -- but at the local and state level instead of in Washington, D.C. Ignored for too long as the bedrock of democracy, local communities now represent the hope for the American promise. Civic nutrition builds civic capacity, citizen responsibility, leadership, volunteerism, and civic pride.

Citizens want to see, feel, and touch government and the resulting growth in local government is testimony. Because of the immediacy of issues that local governments address, such as zoning, public schools, parks and recreation, and public works, citizens have face to face contact with elected officials and public projects. Personal contact enables citizens to experience democracy up close.

In his early work, Peter Drucker focused on what he felt were the central questions of organization: the distribution of power and responsibility, the formulation of general and objective criteria of policy and action, and the selection and training of leaders. His focus on human relationships within the corporation led him to the conclusion that "an

institution is like a tune; it is not constituted by individual sounds but by the relations between them" (*Drucker, 1946, p. 26*). He felt that institutions, like tunes, when in harmony could "induce in their members an intellectual and moral growth beyond a man's original capacities" (*Drucker, 1946, p. 28*). The same can be said for communities. The notion of ordinary people doing extraordinary things is instructive: "the ability of an institution to produce leaders is more important than its ability to produce efficiently and cheaply. . . (W)ithout an able, responsible and enterprising leadership, willing and capable of taking the initiative, the most efficient institution cannot maintain its efficiency, let alone increase it" (*Drucker, 1946, p. 128*).

Government must work hand in glove with local constituencies, but the landscape of community resources is uneven. For example, while organized religion can contribute to civic nutrition, its influence varies. On July 15, 1998, by act of the Kentucky General Assembly, it became legal for ministers and church officers to carry guns inside a house of worship, as long as they have a concealed weapons permit. Willie Ramsey, a preacher at the Somerset Church of Christ, had successfully campaigned to extend the privilege to carry a firearm into a church to men and women of the cloth and to other church officers. "It's a matter of equal rights and equal protection under this gun law," said Ramsey. Responding, Reverend Nancy Jo Kemper, executive director of the Kentucky Council of Churches is quoted as saying, "Jesus would puke" (*Whitmire, 1998*). When leaders lack a sense of civic responsibility, communities lose. When churches lose the capacity to provide sound moral footing, they weaken their capacity to set standards of conduct.

The skills and resources required of local government officials are growing more complex. Privatization by municipalities, although always engaged in to some degree, has now bloomed into a standard way of delivering many services. As cities and counties grapple with ever growing needs, such as the demands that welfare reform place on local communities for job training, employment assistance, childcare and transportation, jurisdictions that used to fight with each other now eye the possibility of regional government cooperatives. MPA classrooms are filled with mid-career officials who have worked in local government for years and now recognize the need to update their skills in order to keep up with job demands. Flooded with information yet starving for certainty, we have yet to take full advantage of the abundance of data, files, reports, and opinions

that are available on the Internet. The information highway is a marvelous resource that has only begun to be tapped for its rich potential. The worldwide web brings information about local governments onto everyone's desktop. Users can go on-line and find information about how local governments are addressing constituent demands and delivering services across the country.

Civic nutrition also comes in the form of resources, both financial and human. Citizens want an agile government but are unwilling to pay more to have it. So our challenge is to use the resources at hand more effectively. This requires that more discretion be allowed for employees and more individual discretion requires greater reliance on individual judgment and ethics. This, then, requires higher levels of citizen empowerment.

Citizen Empowerment

When we turn our attention to the really hard questions, we find our self faced with questions that are not new. Early this century, Mary Parker Follett was writing about citizenship and what it takes to "do it right." In 1918, she wrote about the importance of grassroots citizen participation in her book *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*. She makes the case for citizen empowerment at the grassroots level:

"We get good citizenship by creating those forms within which good citizenship can operate, by making it possible to acquire the habit of good citizenship by the practice of good citizenship. The neighborhood group gives the best opportunity for the training and for the practice of citizenship . . ." (pp. 339-340).

Reliance on experts is less the norm now than it was before science's sparkle dimmed. As the public puts more stock in its own view and less stock in the views of elites, shifts in the way the public interest is defined and determined occur. How this happens remains to be seen. But as responsibility for public programs devolves to local governments, it is incumbent upon us to pursue the question. The downside of this shows up when programs that seem to be rather ordinary become a lightning rod for

competing groups in a community, each wanting its interpretation of the program to prevail. Already, it is not unusual for community public health programs and welfare-to-work projects to fall prey to conflicting coalitions of well-meaning citizens.

The upside, however, is that the possibility grows ever nearer of a direct democracy in our communities, rather than a representative one; of public hearings that are accessible to everyone, thanks to teleconferencing. Before long, even densely populated jurisdictions may soon be able to approximate the town meetings now restricted to small New England towns and villages. However, the barrage of communication has the capacity to complicate the work of local officials. While balanced communication about the community is important, many citizens become hostage to only a few dimensions of news and then assume they are getting a balanced view. I recently read a study that showed that those who watch local news broadcasts on television are more fearful of crime in their neighborhoods than those who do not watch (*Bleyer, 1998*). We are an informed citizenry, but a citizenry not yet able to discriminate between sensationalism and broad-scope information. Government is a labor intensive and information intensive enterprise. The world of knowledge work that Peter Drucker forecasted years ago has come to pass. Our offices are staffed with knowledge workers whose productivity is determined by their ability to access, process, and transmit information. So are our communities.

In addition to the role that local government plays in keeping citizens informed, it also must level the playing field so that all citizens are empowered to perform as full-fledged citizens. Equity -- making room at the table for those traditionally squeezed out -- will continue to be the province of government. This, as John Rohr reminds us, is because government has the responsibility for "running a constitution." In fact, for those who believe that there should be equal opportunity for all Americans, regardless of gender or race, a market failure exists. The incentive system that is supposed to motivate all workers advantages men over women and whites over minorities. This results in lesser degrees of economic opportunity for those in the disadvantaged groups and the underutilization of a major segment of the nation's human resources. So comes the formal notion of affirmative action, which is a logical outgrowth of the persistent tension created by a capitalist economy operating within a democracy that prides itself on individual equality, freedoms, and economic opportunity.

Affirmative action is nothing more than a means to override our basic proclivity to hire and promote those who are like ourselves. Everyone is part of a group, either by gender, by race, by religion, or by ethnicity. Much as an alloy is stronger than a single metal, a diverse community is more capable of adjusting to complexity and new demands than a homogeneous one. The importance of valuing diversity cannot be overstated and the role of government in encouraging it should never be understated. Diversity sharpens our competitive edge. A 1993 study at the University of North Texas pitted racially mixed teams of business students against all-white teams. By the end of the 17-week experiment, the diverse groups were viewing situations from a broader range of perspectives and offering more innovative solutions to problems (*Rice, 1994*).

Although it sounds paradoxical, focusing on diversity has the capacity to unite. It is difficult to bring diverse entities together to solve problems that are regional in scope. Nevertheless, those who study issues of metropolitan governance now recommend a turn away from large, unified, governments. Instead, to address citizen apathy in blighted downtown areas, urban scholars recommend breaking cities up into arrays of neighborhood-based governments that set their own property taxes, elect their own officials, and give city residents the same control that their suburban counterparts take for granted (*Husock, 1998*). Improving neighborhoods in older cities requires not a single, bigger government, experts argue, but increased numbers of smaller ones. This logic is consistent with the devolution from federal control to state control over various public programs.

As citizens become more empowered to pursue their own destinies, the challenge of unification then grows even larger and more challenging for local governments. But the elements of civic nutrition are required if communities are to bond together in a civil fashion.

Civil Communities

To turn (twist?) a phrase, it takes a village to make a village. Law enforcement cannot enforce unless citizens respect the law; schools cannot educate when students are sitting on a beehive of armed intolerance;

government cannot provide services without adequate resources; civil relationships do not develop in the absence of respect for one another. Neighborhood watch programs assume a community spirit. Crime rarely happens among strangers; it usually happens among acquaintances. I now focus attention on civic values and discuss public administration's role in shoring up social institutions that sustain and advance them.

Civil society requires respect for one another, cooperation, openness to opposing views, reasonable argument in the service of truth, and tolerance of differences (*Institute for American Values, 1998*). The relationship between self and community and the tense balance between autonomy and virtue mark the communitarian approach to social philosophy (*The Responsive Community, 1991/92*). How can we promote social norms that are internalized and persuasive in such a fashion that we have non-legal enforcement of social mores; character education and the community's moral voice; and acceptance and tolerance rather than indifference? How can communities achieve substantive ways to reach shared moral understandings and normative foundations of public policy? How can we infuse into the traditional economic justifications for action additional dimensions of inequality and community, social justice and liberty, and the normative limits of the market?

Confidence in the federal government's ability to stop problems of crime, drug abuse, health care and literacy, have turned people's hopes to state and local government. Like an untethered ball, responsibility for action bounces from Washington, D.C. to state capitols; from state capitols to cities and counties; from cities and counties to neighborhoods and from neighborhoods back up the political food chain to state capitols. The state of public administration today mirrors the tensions and uncertainties in every community. If there is a bright side to President Clinton's moral shortcomings, it may be that the public will learn to rely less on those outside their personal sphere and more on themselves and their communities.

As a sign of the times, the United Nations is sponsoring an international conference in 1999 called "Caring Communities for the 21st Century: Villages and Cities for all Generations." The program will examine how communities can build partnerships involving citizens, government, business, and nongovernmental organizations; how

communities are strengthened by multi-generational integration, and how increased longevity will affect communities.

The triangulation of tensions that exist in organizations also exists between government and citizens, especially in communities. The tension between control, cooperation, and autonomy is an uneasy one, with each challenge drawing attention to the fragile balance (*Keidel, 1995*). Privatization by municipalities, although always engaged in to some degree, has now bloomed into a standard way of delivering many services. As cities and counties grapple with ever growing needs, such as the demands that welfare reform place on local communities for job training, employment assistance, childcare and transportation, jurisdictions that used to fight with each other now eye fondly the possibility of regional government cooperatives.

P.T. Barnum-like hucksters sell business ideas to novitiates in government with no appreciation for the fundamental difference between business and government. Many of these "get efficient quick" potions are contradictory: re-engineering requires that managers tear apart an organization and piece it back together more efficiently while TQM preaches continuous, incremental improvement over time. Rookie political appointees are swept into jobs unlike any other they have held. Public sector management fads -- from reinventing to reengineering to downsizing are short-lived. Each time a naive official promises a magic tonic, disappointment and cynicism follow. Yet if Georgia's experiment in human resource management provides a lesson, it is that we are losing faith that merit systems, by definition, identify the "one best worker." We hunger for new ways to address old problems.

Looking back at its ten-year history of awards to local government initiatives, the Ford Foundation asked the Kennedy School of Government to summarize the major lessons that the award-winning programs demonstrate (*Ford Foundation, 1996*). Here are the lessons: 1. Define a mission clearly in terms of compelling problems; 2. Define challenging but achievable outcomes against which to measure performance; 3. Collaborate with other public agencies wherever possible; 4. Build partnerships with the private and nonprofit sectors; 5. Respect the talents of front-line workers; 6. Identify clearly the constituents who are entitled to services and focus on their needs; 7. If tasks involve regulation, work with the regulated parties to meet common objectives through compliance, rather than

depending on top down enforcement; 8. Consider how market forces may complement the provision of public goods and services; 9. Use information technology to improve service delivery; and 10. Be flexible, take risks, and don't give up.

These ten lessons are instructive as communities search for new ways to address old problems. They reflect a combination of citizen-focused service combined with collaborative partnerships. And they emphasize the importance of *the knowledge worker*.

The Administrative State Should Function as a Catalyst. Having set forth the three dimensions that are tantamount to good government at the local level, civic nutrition, citizen empowerment, and civil communities, I will now focus my remarks on the overarching questions before us: Where has the profession been? Where is it going? Where should it be going? and How should it get there? I shall rely on Dwight Waldo's work to trace from whence we have come. As a student of political theory, Waldo wrote a doctoral thesis entitled *The Administrative State* in an attempt to insert the theory of public administration into the canon of political theory. His work argues that public administration is a direct result of positivism, a philosophical foundation that gives rise to the belief that we can control our environment if we rely on science. Waldo argued that the Twentieth Century saw the practice of public administration, just as that of scientific management, become deeply rooted in the scientific method. The "one best way" of Taylorism gives way to the "one best person" of the merit system. However, Waldo warned that merely training public administrators in the mechanics of administration and arming them with a code of ethics is not enough.

Waldo (1948) makes clear that an ongoing tension within our government surrounds the need to reconcile democracy with efficiency. While autocratic procedures enhance efficiency, democracy slows it down. No one argues with the fact that democracy, at least in the short run, is the most inefficient means for running programs. The search for the golden mean is as omnipresent now as it was fifty years ago when he wrote. Empowerment of workers, decentralization, and ensuring maximum participation are the hallmarks of total quality management *and of democracy*. But sunshine laws, documentation, and adherence to legislated mandates, are the insurance policy that citizens demand to guard against a government that otherwise could become too powerful, too mighty, in other words, too efficient. He says

To the extent that democracy has been thought superior and ultimate as a form of government and way of life, it has itself served as the higher law to which everything else must be referred . . . (p. 15).

A decade of attention to reinventing government now brings us full circle to Dwight Waldo's focus on the state as an administrative body, to Drucker's focus on the "mission" of the organization, to Herbert Simon's notion of the public/private nexus, and to John Rohr's fascination with "running a constitution"

Unlike those who emphasize the difference between government and business, or those who ignore differences between the two, Herbert Simon (1995) views the public and private sectors of the economy as being intertwined and interdependent:

[M]odern economies are not market economies but systems of organizations, private and public, embedded in markets. Free markets do not flourish amidst anarchy, but depend for their very existence on the rule-making and rule-enforcing functions of government... (p.404).

Nowhere is this more evident than in the maneuverings of local governments as they compete with one another to land developing industries. This postmodern environment brings with it perplexing challenges. Accountability and performance are expected at all levels in all offices. Those who govern find themselves positioned squarely in the role of market protector and coordinator of services, as well as a deliverer of services.

As contracting with the private sector has gained popularity in municipalities around the nation, tensions have built among public sector workers. Fearing loss of jobs, they resist moves to contract for services. Cohen and Eimicke (1995) cite examples of cities that have effectively addressed this mounting problem. Studying Philadelphia, New York City, and Indianapolis in the winter of 1994/1995, they describe the efforts of these cities as they reinvent the way they administer municipal programs. Citing Philadelphia's successful example, they explain that the city was unusually successful at quelling the fears of city workers by developing new job classifications that better fit workers who were being displaced from one department to another. The reclassification incorporated the skill

and educational level of workers experienced in one public sector job and smoothed the transition to a similar job in another agency of the city.

Innovations such as this respond to the need to manage change. Strategies to manage the inherent conflict between the comfortable routines of the past and unproven routines of the future come face to face. Franchising public services, such as cable television and utilities, contracting for services, such as garbage and street maintenance, call upon public management skills that incorporate mediation and negotiation strategies, contract monitoring, and competitive bidding processes.

Implications. For public administrators to nurture civil communities, it is important to be aware that the field is moving from a *closed-ended* enterprise with canned answers to an *open-ended* enterprise responsible for seeking answers. The transition from certainty to ambiguity is an uneasy one. The complexity of the job, the information it uses and generates, and the different kinds of relationships needed to do the work challenge the best of us. Climbing to the top is less a steady climb up a stepladder and more like a journey through a field of vines where you must bring your own machete (*Drucker, 1995*). The words of Dwight Waldo ring true today, just as they did when he wrote them in 1956:

My own point of view is that since administration is so large a subject, and still in many ways so dark, we should open upon it all the windows we can find; that all models and idioms have their virtues -- and their vices; that as we proceed we exercise as much intelligence and good will as we can command in determining what any particular model can or cannot do for us. (*p. 49*)

A quick glance at President Clinton's 1998 State of the Union address demonstrates this eclectic approach to public policy as well as public management. In the speech, he referred to a panoply of programs, aimed at community building, education and research, information technology, and the global economy. The breadth of initiatives and the mastery that each one requires of administrators reflects the demands that face those who enter the field. It is complex, comprehensive, and in many ways uncharted territory.

I believe we should take Dwight Waldo's words to heart. We must be open to new ideas for how we may best achieve the goals of

government. Those who wrote in the middle of this century planted a foundation for all of us as we face the challenges of a new century and of providing good government by and for a new generation of Americans. We must be flexible, take risks, and not give up.

Conclusion

We are a curious profession because we do not perform a unique set of tasks. In fact, our occupational training (accounting, law, engineering, education, social work, biological research, policy analysis) is the medium through which we ply our trade. Our trade is to serve as an advocate for good government and to insist that the spirit as well as the intent of the constitution is upheld. If we don't do it, who will? Not the business community who, by design, must pull in the direction of self interest; not the churches, each of which busily proselytizes sinful brethren while building new parking lots; not the schools, whose teachers barely know what the constitution says. The best of our elected officials are excellent advocates for good government, but they are too few and far between to handle the task by themselves. Not the courts, who only respond to individual cases after events have occurred.

In summary, let me say a few words about those of us who teach, for that is where this sort of dialogue has its greatest impact. We get so embroiled in debates about the proper curriculum for policy analysis students, budgeting and finance specialists, human resource managers, and others that we lose sight of the substrate that must undergird all of our teaching, regardless of specialization. Debates about public choice, new public management, privatization, and political economy assume a common understanding about civic life and prioritized values. In fact, this presupposition is more likely false than true.

Those of us who are tenured are in the best position to advocate for good government. Steeped in the "value-free" doctrine of empiricism, many of this generation of scholars find it strangely uncomfortable to speak as an advocate for good government. Yet, protected by tenure, we have a bully pulpit. We can speak truth to power. Our colleagues who practice administration must be more constrained in their advocacy,

sending their message persistently yet tactfully, more by example than by overt speech, lest the elected officials who direct their work take umbrage.

When we fail to advocate and fail to imbue our students with the values that turned us on to public service many years ago, we miss a golden opportunity to advance our civil society. I encourage those of you who teach to go back to your classrooms and ask students a few questions about constitutional values and how these can be enlivened through civic nutrition, citizen empowerment, and civil communities. Once your students are all thinking in the same vein, then move them to a discussion of how their chosen specialization relates to civic culture and our American interpretation of democracy in action.

The art of administration is the art of creating order out of chaos. I hope my remarks illustrate how the field of public administration practices this art. By serving as a catalyst for community action, economic development, and human services programs, we provide part of the nutrition that feeds a community. By respecting the importance of citizen participation in public programs and communicating effectively, we contribute to citizen empowerment. By valuing the importance of stable communities, we bolster those citizens who understand the importance of comprehensive plans for neighborhoods and add volume to their voice. We must work from this vantage, where we see the confluence of these three dimensions to life in community, if we are to meet the challenge that we are best prepared to tackle: improving quality of life and advancing the highest traditions of American democracy.

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