

**Capacity Building: The Public Organization 21st Century Management and Leadership
Challenge**

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Abstract

Practitioners and academics agree: public organizations face enormous challenges. This paper posits the challenge of managing and leading public service organizations in the 21st century is first and foremost a challenge of developing capacity. Understanding and responding to this capacity challenge is found in the need for organizational leaders who effectively reach across sectors and organizational boundaries to create innovative alliances and collaborations to steward the trust of stakeholders and successfully navigate change. Stewarding the trust of stakeholders necessitates strength grounded in mutual accountability developed through relationship building. Effectiveness in stewarding the trust of stakeholders in a climate of change is what drives crossing sector and organizational boundaries. How effectiveness is defined and measured in the 21st century is both vital to the agenda, and shapes the challenges, for management and leadership of public service organizations.

The Neighborhood Leadership Academy at Savannah State University (NLA) began as an initiative of Step Up Savannah. The Step Up Savannah nonprofit was launched by a group of community leaders in 2005 and aims to alleviate poverty in Chatham County, Georgia. NLA is a 12-week leadership intensive training that serves to create a critical mass of community leaders to serve as agents of change. Step Up's vision for NLA is a mechanism to produce leaders to empower the voice and position of Chatham County's impoverished. One evening several graduate students of the Savannah State University Master of Public Administration program joined the session. Central to the lesson that evening was NLA students understanding how to develop strength through relationship building with individuals, institutions, and organizations. The graduate students are there to observe and support, including participation in the break-out groups focusing on problem definition and telling the story that illustrates the problem. This learning environment consisting of training community leaders with graduate student participation is a picture of developing management and leadership capacity to meet the challenges facing public service organizations in the 21st century.

The challenge of managing and leading public service organizations in the 21st century is first and foremost a challenge of developing capacity. Though executed in a contemporary environment characterized by collaboration and diffused power, the Gulick and Urwick components of planning, organizing, directing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting express the essence of management in public service organizations, government and nonprofit alike. Moreover, a culturally sensitive understanding of organizational leadership is expressed in the work of Robert House and his colleagues, "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members." The capacity challenge is found in the need for organizational

leaders who effectively reach across sectors and organizational boundaries to create innovative alliances and collaborations to steward the trust of stakeholders and successfully navigate change.

Crossing boundaries and creating relationships to effectively provide public service is underscored by accomplished practitioners. Martin O'Malley, Maryland's governor and former mayor of Baltimore, and Mayor Tony Williams, Washington, D.C.(1999-2007) and current CEO of Federal City Council, both elaborated these important challenges at the 2013 annual conference of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (a.k.a. NASPAA). Characterizing this as a time of "enormous challenge," Governor O'Malley posited that a new wave a leadership is emerging across the country from the next generation of leaders, like those in the NLA session. He describes them as emphasizing effective collaboration and measured performance. Moreover, Governor O'Malley explained the centrality of a collaborative concept of delivery where human actors responsible for delivery are identified and steps taken to strengthen weak links. Strengthening weak links is a capacity building effort that enhances management and leadership in public organizations. Mayor Williams emphasized collaboration by advocating for change initiated at the local level. He called for more opportunities involving collaborations of students and business leaders drawing on the Allegheny Conference model of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mayor Williams described and illustrated the employment of pushing to advance an agenda, reconnecting with constituencies, and then rebuilding support. Crossing sector boundaries—such as, government, nonprofit, and firms—and creating relationships for effective public service is embraced by members of the practitioner community at this time of great challenge.

The conclusion of California State University's Dr. Montgomery Van Wart, that leadership is a group process, emphasizes the importance of creating relationships for effective service. In the July/August 2013 edition of Public Administration Review he expresses the challenge of capacity building as embedded in the challenge to "flatten organizations, provide more organic structures, enhance social integration, create learning organizations with change at the lowest level possible, and...ways to include clients and the public more fluidly." His review of the literature surfaced a challenge included in Governor O'Malley discussion of the weak link: the capacity for mutually agreeable accountability.

Mayor Tony Williams discussed this challenge in terms of settled expectations, covenants of partnership that are agreed to and can be relied on. These accountability expectation covenants are not changed at the whim of powerful actors of the moment. Stewarding the trust of stakeholders, while reaching across sectors to develop innovative alliances and collaborations necessitates the strength focused on in the NLA class session. It is a strength grounded in mutual accountability developed through relationship building with individuals, institutions, and organizations. Moreover, Dr. Van Wart posits that public administrators who have successfully served in complex environments have much to offer leaders across the sectors.

Dr. Soren Haggroth is such a leader. The July/August 2013 Public Administration Review account of his service as the director general of the National Fortifications Agency in Sweden contains important insights for all leaders "in the ever-transforming reality of today and tomorrow.". For purpose of this discussion, chief among these is his key to successfully implementing substantial change, inclusion. Dr. Haggroth illustrates the capacity needed to garner the support discussed by Mayor Williams. In particular, Dr. Haggroth discusses questions

important to employees as a stakeholder group. It is vital that employees are committed to activities deemed essential to organizational advancement. Developing strength through relationship building with individuals, institutions, and organizations creates capacity important to managing and leading public organizations in the 21st century, including public servant staff.

The Neighborhood Leadership Academy at Savannah State University will soon have a session exploring how leadership can change structures that maintain poverty conditions. The graduate students will rejoin the NLA cohort. This time the graduate students will be observing the session through the lens of how change is defined and measured. Effectiveness in stewarding the trust of stakeholders in a climate of change is what drives crossing sector and organizational boundaries to create innovative alliances and collaborations. How effectiveness is defined and measured in the 21st century is both vital to the agenda, and shapes the challenges, for management and leadership of public service organizations.

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