

13th Session CEPA: Contribution to the “Call for Inputs”

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Subject: Invigorating the professionalism and morale of the public service:
Bringing the Public Back into Public Administration

Summary

The normative idea of bringing the public back into public policy, administration, and management is once again making a comeback in liberal democracies. It is feared that citizens are being treated too much like subjects as they once were in absolutist regimes. Bureaucratism has gone too far. Citizens feel that they are becoming increasingly powerless and manipulated in confronting the authorities who simply over-rule them.

In addition, the challenge of finding, defining and supporting adequate leadership neither has been greater nor has been more pressing. Domestic and global recession, multiple armed conflicts, sovereign debt crisis, and global environmental and natural disasters each challenge the capacity of public managers to respond effectively. These crises and the inadequate leadership of some public managers highlight the importance of effective public administration.

Despite these unprecedented demonstrations of the consequences and risks of inadequate leadership capacity in public organizations, the profession of public administration has not fully embraced leadership as an important element of successful practice. The debate encompasses the distinction between politics, values and administration in a constitutional democracy.

It is true to some extent that opportunities to participate in public administration are insufficiently taken and that chosen representatives may not be properly qualified. This for some good reasons maybe unavoidable. First, most adults are very busy on the matters of immediate and pressing concern to them such as: staying alive, taking care of themselves and their loved ones, dealing with neighbours, contractors, repairers, salespersons and the myriad of things that have to be done every day by them or the hope of someone else taking care of it. Second, willing newcomers are green behind the ears and take time to learn the ropes. Besides, lacking knowledge they don't know how to behave without prior preparations. Third, what goes on can be mystifying, a seeming waste of valuable time, repetition, tedious routine and ritual, and simply boring. There are much better things to do and more important things to attend to. But even if not heard, one can be seen and showing up is the least that is expected. Fourth, the presence is needed to those who really run the show and they can be relied upon not to rock the boat. Fifth, they continue to have their say but little notice is taken of them by those who have heard it all before and know what is coming. Sixth, the skilled participants contrive ways to rid themselves of such nuisances who talk to themselves. The insiders want to end the charade that fools only those who want to be fooled.

The saddest of all this is the misuse and abuse of volunteers outside the emergency situation, volunteers that are willing to give their time and do whatever it takes. It's has been questioned if

public organizations appreciate the volunteers at all if compared to private organizations that consider them a source of comments and suggestions that contributes to performance.

We predict that public leaders are the most effective in meeting the expectations of public service employees and thereby able to obtain greater organizational efficiency when they combine authentic value-based leadership with a willingness and ability to share leadership responsibilities with internal and external stakeholders, and the ability to effectively engage and encourage individual employees role through inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation.

As indicated in *Public Administration Review* (Thomas 2013), the normative idea of bringing the public back into public policy, administration, and management is once again making a comeback in liberal democracies. It is feared that citizens are being treated too much like subjects as they once were in absolutist regimes. Bureaucratism has gone too far. Citizens feel that they are becoming increasingly powerless and manipulated in confronting the authorities who simply over-rule them. The public sphere is too dominated by unrepresentative elites and technocrats who assume they know what is good or better for everyone else; they ride roughshod without properly listening to anyone else. So, liberal democracies feel obliged to demonstrate otherwise. They undertake reforms and innovations to show that they do value increased public participation. They do not view members of the general public as mere subjects at all. Citizens perform many different roles, such as valued sounding boards, customers, partners, voters, taxpayers, shareholders, volunteers, change agents, advocates, aggrieved clients, intelligent choosers, prioritizers, and possible sources of new ideas, policies, suggestions, and tactics. Government may be becoming more businesslike, with increasing emphasis on frugality, economy, and efficiency, that may offend the recipients of public goods and services used to different treatment but it is far from being a self-serving business. It deals with much greater community concerns for which it remains responsible and accountable. It cherishes its traditional objectives of advancing the common, good, protecting individual liberties and rights, safeguarding the commons, ensuring good governance, demonstrating trust and integrity, seeking social justice, and providing a human face. It does resist maladministration and bureaupathology (Caiden 1991) that give offense and requires the public to indicate where it can and should perform better.

Lifelong enthusiasts of democratic administration and fellow observers and researchers of the progress being made by opening up opportunities to increase public participation in public policy, administration, and management, rejoice in the successes being made, particularly at local government level (Cheema 2013). However, there is disappointment among them that the movement is being frustrated by the amount of resistance and scorn being expressed both officially and furtively in the corridors of power towards any invasion of amateurs on professional turf. How much resentment exists cannot be empirically verified but it clearly does. It shows an arrogance that belies the democratic ethos. This is seen, for instance, in the intolerant attitude whenever the institution of the ombudsman is broached as a means of enabling aggrieved citizens to have their complaints against public administrators judged by an independent third party (Caiden 1983). Countries which had adopted it acknowledged that was invaluable in reducing smoldering public hostility toward officialdom, correcting administrative mistakes and

deficiencies, sometimes revealing gross injustice, and educating the citizenry about how government worked, what the law was, and why things were done the way they were. Despite the evidence, the very idea of encouraging complaints was considered an abomination and an affront to public servants although most complaints were found baseless in investigation. Behind the opposition to further public participation was the argument that government is not for amateurs and the belief that the public in general has very little if anything worthwhile to contribute. The art of governance requires uncommon talent, professional development and experience, technical skills, and detailed knowledge. These narrow the field and in effect reduce participation to favored insiders. Bringing in outsiders who believe that they have been deliberately left out, ignored, and otherwise disregarded may help to prevent their becoming more alienated, disgruntled, and uncooperative, thereby making governance less difficult than it need be. But having them represented should surely be sufficient. Having them participate in the action is something else because they will only get in the way, be a nuisance, slow things down, make impractical suggestions, raise irrelevances, and probably fail to show up on some silly pretext. They are likely to be unreliable and irresponsible, and they cannot be held fully accountable. They have only themselves to blame should they choose incompetent representatives.

It is true to some extent that opportunities to participate are insufficiently taken and that chosen representatives may not be properly qualified. This for some very good reasons may be inevitable. First, most adults are very busy on the matters of immediate and pressing concern to them. These include just staying alive, looking after themselves and their loved ones, bringing up children, dealing with neighbors, contractors, repairers, salespersons, and the myriad of things that have to be done every day. Everything else takes second place and has to wait its turn. For most, this is all they can manage. When they cannot attend to other matters, they expect or hope that others will take care of them on their behalf or they will not need doing after all. Abdicating their part, they are willing to take the consequences not because they cannot be bothered. They don't have the time, resources, and energy, unless ideologically devoted to a cause for which they are prepared to die or they see some personal advantage in participating that they could lose. Otherwise, they expect to be adequately compensated for spending their time on public business, and once so compensated it may be worth their while to hang on even after they have no further contribution to make and should be replaced by someone else who has.

Second, willing newcomers are green behind the ears and take time to learn the ropes. If they plunge straight in, they are in danger of making fools of themselves and ignored until they know what to do without making exhibitions of themselves. Besides lacking sufficient substantive information, they don't know how to behave without prior preparation. They are like lost sheep that have to be brought into the fold for their own protection. . Otherwise, they are unlikely to achieve anything and might as well not be there for all the good they do. Where proceedings are broadcast, eccentricism and exhibitionism may draw attention but they also repel and cause other people to lose both attention and respect.

Third, at first, what goes on can be mystifying, a seeming waste of valuable time, tedious routine, repetition, and ritual, and simply boring. There are much better things to do and more important things to attend to. But even if not heard, one can be seen and showing up is the least that is expected. One's absence may be considered a dereliction of duty, disinterest, and an affront to attendees even if the latter don't utter a sound. At least, the latter are present, can

interrupt proceedings, and vote. Absentees cannot. Tediousness is part of the price of doing public business, perhaps involving lengthy periods of boredom. Occupying one's attention with other matters may mean missing a crucial point and causing resentment among the restrained. Fourth, when finally fully participating, amateurs too often find themselves so outmatched and outclassed that they despair of ever convincing or persuading the slick professionals. The cards seem so stacked against them that they begin to lose interest: they begin to think of dropping out: and eventually they remove themselves and drop out without anybody noticing their disappearance. There seems little point flogging a dead horse or banging one's head against the wall? Nobody else seems to care. There are always others willing to try their luck until they too get disillusioned and withdraw. Meantime, the hacks hang on, keep up pretences, and just go along with the crowd, risking little and further entrenching themselves. Their presence is needed to those who really run the show and they can be relied upon not to rock the boat. Fifth, those who persist regardless are perceived as odd-balls to be humored until they get the message to change their tune or just keep silent. Everyone else knows what has been said countless times before and behind one's back may well mimic one's contribution. The opportunists move on. The dogmatists are seen as uncompromising and no longer worth taking seriously. They continue to have their say but little notice is taken of them by those who have heard it all before and know what is coming.

Sixth, finally, the skilled participants contrive ways to rid themselves of such nuisances who talk to themselves. The insiders want to end the charade that fools only those who want to be fooled.

The saddest aspect of all is the abuse and misuse of volunteers outside of emergency situations. One would think that public organizations would only be too grateful that volunteers are willing to do whatever is required of them. Private organizations certainly are, and see them not just as free labor but as ambassadors of goodwill and a valuable source of suggestions and comments that contribute to improving performance. In the public sector, there are likewise public agencies that also acknowledge the benefits of engaging volunteers who give of their time and themselves to help. When short staffed or lacking career openings, they understand that they could not provide the level of service they do without voluntary assistance. Even so, many careerists wonder what can be the motives of the volunteers working for nothing, how capable can they be, and what do they have to offer besides their enthusiasm. Not much harm can be done if they are employed on routine, repetitive work that nobody is happy doing. Whenever they suggest changes, they can be dismissed with the excuse that their ideas have been tried before and not worked out any better than is being done. Anyway, free labor can always be abused without much embarrassment or retribution. Their disappearance can always be excused because they never really fitted in. This does not stop the disillusioned from bad-mouthing public administration and putting off other possible recruits and volunteers. Free labor does not come that cheap.

How does such information on the reality behind the scenes get known? Only from participants who see much from within and who are willing to reveal what they have experienced. There are many reasons why they keep silent despite appeals from empiricists that if this is how public business is conducted behind closed doors, it should be known just to offset normative wishful thinking that believes differently. Probably, a flood of such revelations would just add fuel to the many critics of the public space, realists that undermine the reformers and the idealists who

already face overwhelming odds to advocate greater public participation in governance in general and public administration in particular. After all, in just a generation, other human activities have been transformed and revolutionized their modus operandi. Why not public administration too? Thankfully, the idealists and reformers persist and don't give up all that easily on the notion of democratic governance and democratic administration, which is why so many so many public professionals are attracted to public service in the first place.

References

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