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GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE

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The Five Dimensions of Leadership

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Today's government managers have to be leaders! The traditional command-and-control bureaucracy won't work in a modern work place—in or out of government.

But isn't the idea of "leaders everywhere" a prescription for chaos? Doesn't it overestimate the competence of government employees? The widely held "star" model of leadership argues that someone has to be in charge to make things happen, that we need followers to do the work and that very few people are natural leaders, or stars. In the star model, the exceptional person at the top has to tell the rest what to do.

But the star model has some serious liabilities. It encourages others with knowledge and insight to become quiet followers awaiting orders from above. It encourages employees to assume that those above them have a plan and the answers—when most often they do not. It is too slow and creates bottlenecks at the top. And it promotes an institutional culture of avoiding risks.

Also, it is dangerous to let the effectiveness of any of our government institutions depend on a single individual. Leadership should be the responsibility of people throughout the organization.

It's easy to see how a Cabinet Secretary can be in a leadership role, but how does a mid-level career manager or a GS-9 employee exert leadership? To answer this question, we need a broader concept of leadership that captures how people behave in effective organizations.

Dimensions of Leadership

Leadership involves assuming responsibility for showing the way. A leader speaks out about what can be done to achieve the organization's mission more effectively and effi-

ciently and how different groups within an organization can contribute.

How a person exerts leadership depends on his or her position in the organization and on personal style. But in every case, leaders have to operate in five dimensions:

- Hierarchical Leadership (downward management)
- Subordinate Leadership (upward management)
- Collegial Leadership (peer management)
- Public Leadership (environmental management)
- Process Leadership (administrative management)

Many managers make the mistake of focusing on only one or two of these dimensions, but complete leaders provide management in five areas. The ability to do this is what separates leaders from mediocre managers and outstanding organizations from average ones.

However, being only human, few individuals at the top can excel in all five domains. So leadership from within an organization is needed. Leaders who recognize their limitations can work to build the complete organization by creating a team of people who together cover all the leadership bases. The complete organization is a powerful entity.

The complete leader and the complete organization are closely linked. But one must not forget that organizations consist of real, live human beings. Leadership is thus also about managing personal relationships. While the top leader might manage and lead many individuals whom he or she does not know personally, day-to-day management usually involves working with individuals one knows very well. The importance of interpersonal skills in each facet of leadership must not be underestimated.

Organizations cannot depend only on "star" leadership.



Any organization chart is a map of hierarchical leadership positions. An agency is broken up into line and staff units, each placed carefully in some pyramiding chain of command.

The star model of leadership focuses on the top of the pyramid. But you can provide hierarchical leadership at every level by making sure your unit contributes to the overall performance and mission of the organization.

Hierarchical leadership falls to those who have to manage downwards—that is, to organize and supervise people over whom they have direct authority. Hierarchical leadership consists of:

- articulating the organization's mission;
- translating that mission into measurable and achievable goals;
- enabling people to focus on goals;
- continuously reinforcing behavior that

contributes to the mission.

Hierarchical leaders set goals that inspire and challenge people because they bring the agency's mission to life. These goals are challenging because they are achievable only by rethinking and changing how employees operate.

We can see hierarchical leadership in political appointees, in career executives and at every level of the bureaucracy.

Of the five dimensions, hierarchical leadership is the most obvious. If you manage people, it follows that you need leadership skills. Walk into an organization, and you can quickly tell if hierarchical leadership is missing. In those organizations, people have jobs, but no sense of mission or direction. They don't know how they fit into the bigger picture, and there is no sense of urgency about what they do.

The Gulf War provided the nation with an effective demonstration of hierarchical leadership. Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf won many accolades for his leadership during the war. But hierarchical leadership was only one dimension of the performance of Schwarzkopf and his colleagues, Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense, and Gen. Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Washington Post* writer Bob Woodward's new book, *The Commanders* (Simon and Schuster, 1991), provides many examples of the subordinate, collegial, public and process leadership skills of the three men during the Gulf crisis. Downward management appears to have been the easiest of the many management challenges faced by Schwarzkopf and his colleagues.

Subordinate Leadership



MOVIE STILL ARCHIVES

The least-talked-about leadership skill is subordinate leadership. Yet it can be argued that careers are in fact made or broken by an individual's ability or inability to effectively "manage" his or her boss and provide subordinate leadership.

Subordinate leadership is absolutely imperative because the people in charge are only human. Bosses do not have all the knowledge, skills and information the job requires. They always need help, whether or not they know it.

Subordinate leadership means:

- helping your superiors clarify and articulate agency mission and goals;
- assuming responsibility for hierarchical leadership roles that superiors are, for what-

ever reason, unable to fill;

- helping superiors keep focused on the things truly crucial to achieving the mission;
- not letting superiors do things that will cause the agency to fail in its mission.

Before you can effectively exercise subordinate leadership, you must have your own act together. You need interpersonal skills, control of your own ego and a realization that for your agency to succeed, your boss must succeed.

The Commanders offers two examples of outstanding subordinate leadership, the first by Powell and the second by Schwarzkopf. Woodward tells the dramatic story of Powell's meeting with President Bush to make certain Bush had adequately considered the option of continuing the economic sanctions instead of launching a high-risk offensive to drive the Iraqi army from Kuwait. Bush at the time was clearly moving away from the containment strategy, and thus it was not an easy decision for Powell to go to see the President on the issue. But he did so, meeting his responsibility to his boss, the nation and himself.

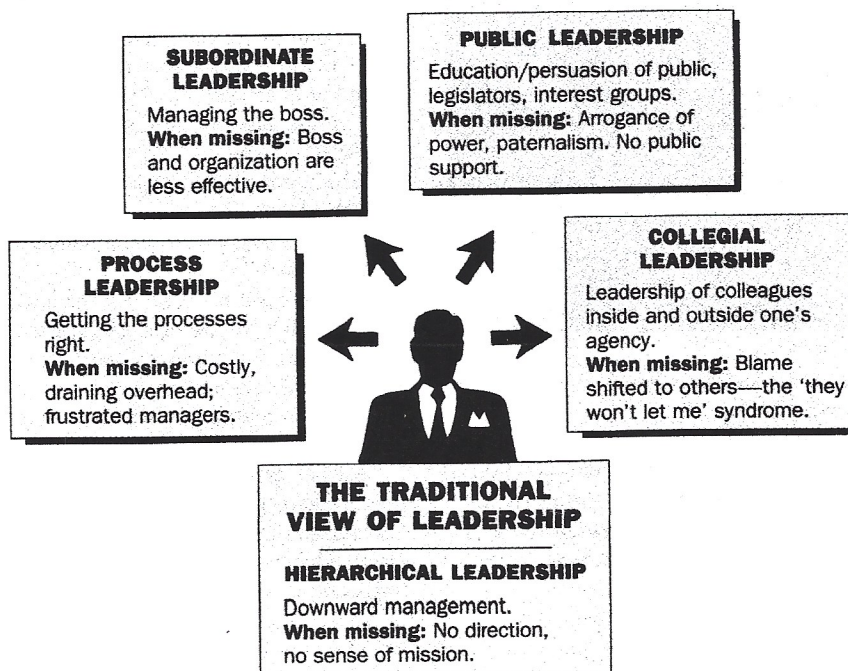
The second example is Schwarzkopf's constant pressure on Powell for greater clarification of both the U.S. mission in Saudi Arabia and the resources to be made available for the mission. As each day ticked by, the general became more and more insistent on clearer guidelines and a clearer mission statement. He also was living up to his responsibilities.

These dramatic actions by Powell and Schwarzkopf came at the highest levels of government. But they are no different from thousands of conversations that should occur daily between GS-9s and their bosses, GM-15s and their Senior Executive Service bosses, or SES members and their bosses. The most interesting test of subordinate leadership occurs between career and political appointees.

Washington is full of stories of individuals who have failed at subordinate leadership and upward management. One involves former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Joseph Califano, who was acclaimed as a great manager. While he may have been very effective in his hierarchical and public leadership roles, Califano ultimately failed to demonstrate upward-management skills. He had difficulty listening to his President and appears not to have defined his job to include upward management of his boss and the White House staff.

Communication problems between Califano and then-President Jimmy Carter began early in the Carter Administration. In developing the department's initial welfare-reform proposal, Califano did not understand that the President sought a "no-cost" reform package. A participant in a meeting between Califano and the President on welfare reform recalls, "I was sitting in the meeting and just watching [the faces of Cali-

THE FACETS OF LEADERSHIP



fano and his staff] and realizing they didn't know the way [President Carter] thinks—it was a terrible shock to them.”

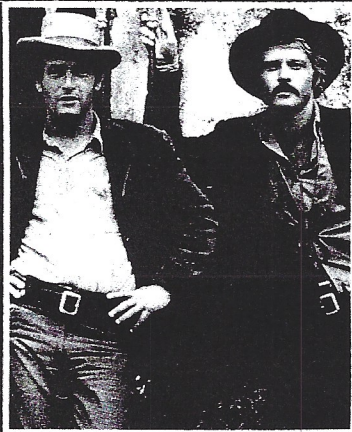
Califano learned the hard way that he should have paid more attention to his boss's policies. He lost the confidence of his President and the White House staff and was dismissed in 1979, along with several other Cabinet Secretaries.

Non-profit organizations place a premium on subordinate leadership. In their world, the executive director's challenge is not to get too far ahead or too far behind his or her board of trustees. An executive director must constantly meet and listen to the board. What are they saying? Do they feel the organization is moving in the right direction? In many instances, an executive director must work to build consensus around a new initiative. *Showing* the way often means carefully *paving* the way as well. There are simply no shortcuts in working with people—especially with those above you in an organization.

The personal consequences of failing to manage upward effectively are either to be fired—as Califano was—or to be ignored by those in power.

When subordinate leadership is missing in a government organization, the agency's top manager usually looks ineffective or inept. The boss's strengths are ignored and weaknesses are magnified. Unfortunately, this public perception also means that the agency mission is suffering. Subordinates must help their bosses succeed.

Collegial Leadership



Collegial leadership is the most underrated leadership domain.

The truth is that what you can accomplish with your own authority is almost always quite limited. If your unit is to be successful, you must get your peers, in your own organization and in related organizations, to commit and take certain actions.

The real power in government is held by those with the ability to cajole, persuade and compromise. In many ways, this is the most

difficult—and perhaps most important—leadership skill necessary to succeed in large organizations.

It is common for individuals to succeed at upward management—by being helpful to their bosses—but ultimately to fail because they cannot get along with their peers or work effectively in small groups.

It is interesting to note that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is not in the chain of command during a time of war. Rather, he serves as an adviser to the Secretary of Defense and the President, while having communications and oversight responsibility with the commanders-in-chief of the 10 unified and specified commands.

Powell and Cheney are constantly meeting—both individually and in small groups—with Secretary of State James Baker, national security council adviser Brent Scowcroft and White House chief of staff John Sununu. There is no chain of command or hierarchy among these six individuals. Each is an equal, attempting to serve the President and the nation by working together and presenting his own personal views and the best judgments of the organizations he represents.

Collegial leadership means:

- understanding how units and individuals outside your control work with your unit to achieve the agency mission;
- developing working relationships with all outside units necessary to accomplish the mission;
- clarifying, amplifying and getting agreement on common goals and objectives toward which a number of units can work together;
- contributing to teams that cut across organizational boundaries.

The absence of collegial leadership shows up in excuses. As you meet with managers who lack this skill, you soon find them talking about the infamous “they”:

“I’m not doing [what’s needed] because *they* won’t let me.”

“That’s not my job; *they* are supposed to do that.”

“I did my job. I sent out a memo. *They* didn’t respond.”

Any important initiative will run into hurdles. You can’t get the job slots you need, the procurement will take two years, you have to get three levels of approval, and so on. Collegial leadership can overcome such obstacles.

Collegial leadership and peer management require teamwork. While the concept of teamwork may sound hackneyed, it is crucial in effective organizations. There are no important one-person problems. Individuals in teams must work together because they want to—not because they have been ordered to do so—and because the agency mission requires it.

Public Leadership



THE BETTMAN ARCHIVE

Public leadership is the most glamorous dimension. Political appointees often spend much of their time in the public leadership role. It’s part listening, part educating and part selling to the people affected by government programs and policies.

As with the hierarchical leadership domain, the star model is not sufficient here. Public leadership can’t start and stop at the top. It must be developed at every level. Career government employees have shied away from public leadership, seeing it as the prerogative of political appointees.

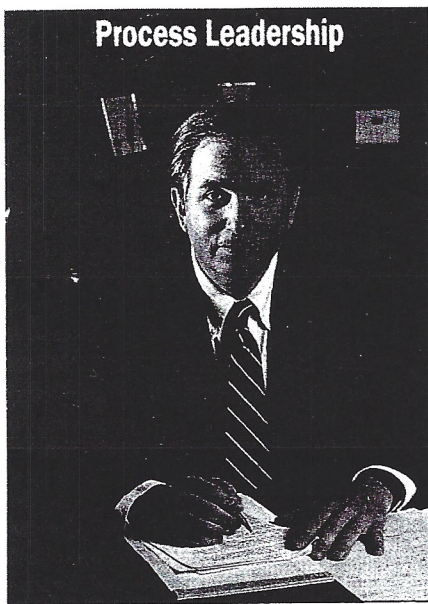
But in a democracy, a major role of a government agency has to be interacting with the public—to learn, to inform and to educate. GM-14s won’t appear on “Meet the Press,” but GM-14s running a program must know whether that program is effective and how the public perceives it. They are also responsible for communicating the success of that program to the public.

In addition to managing the troops, Schwarzkopf and his colleagues did an outstanding job of managing the public environment. One of the lessons the military learned during the Vietnam War was the importance of honest communication with the American public. While one may debate the extent to which the military attempted to “manage” the press during the Gulf War, an increased effort was made to communicate directly to the public. Schwarzkopf, Powell and Cheney viewed talking to the public as part of their jobs.

The absence of public leadership shows up as arrogance and hostility on the part of agency employees and managers. When these people disparage oversight by elected officials, are hostile to oversight by other agencies and discount the input of client groups, public management has failed. The agency becomes self-centered and turns inward. It fails to develop public support.

A case in point is the Energy Department, which failed for years to acknowledge and correct the environmental and safety problems associated with its nuclear program, despite vocal public concern. Yet DOE also offers an example of salutary corrective actions by top managers: Its new Office of Nuclear Safety this year won an award for exposing long-concealed safety problems at the Hanford, Wash., nuclear reservation. A chapter of the American Society of Public Administration presented the Elmer B. Staats Award for Accountability in Government to office director Stephen M. Blush in June.

Unlike some of the other dimensions of leadership, environmental leadership may have *too much* sex appeal. Many high-level officials come to Washington and conclude that environmental management is their only job. If they can manage the press, Congress and interest groups, they will succeed. These public roles lead many officials to neglect their hierarchical, collegial and subordinate leadership responsibilities.



Process leadership is the most vulnerable to self-delusion on the part of those practicing it. You can come in and install new processes—MBO, ZBB, PPBS, TQM—and think you are leading or managing. But all you have done is force people to fill out your forms to get what they want. It's likely that you have only added cost and delay.

Process can be frustrating, but process is essential to government. It gives coherence, order and control. Administrative systems provide the structure required for effective operations.

Process leadership is about getting the process right so that it enables, adds value and improves productivity. It includes:

- putting in place the administrative systems and processes required to achieve the mission;
- minimizing the overhead cost of administration;
- tracking down and eliminating the negative side-effects of administrative systems;
- making sure each administrative system adds value and produces satisfaction among internal clients.

A recent example of exemplary process leadership was the enactment of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990. OPM Director Constance Newman and her career staff, led by associate director for personnel systems and oversight Claudia Cooley, developed a significant reform package for the general-schedule pay system. Including pay adjustments, locality pay and increased pay flexibilities, the package was a constructive improvement in the government-wide personnel system.

An example of process leadership gone wrong is the infamous attempt by the Carter Administration to implement Zero-Based Budgeting. In contrast to traditional budgeting, which uses the previous year's level of funding as its base, ZBB attempted to have agencies start at "zero," to reevaluate each of their programs from the bottom up.

As with most process improvements, the concept of ZBB had some merit. The prob-

lem was that the previous incremental style of budgeting continued. Agencies were thus forced to prepare two budgets—one in the old format for Congress and one in the new ZBB format for the Office of Management and Budget. It was duplication of effort at its worst, and ZBB slowly faded into the sunset as another failed process.

Process leadership has to be exercised at all levels and by both staff and line managers. If a program manager finds the personnel or procurement systems are hurting the program, that manager has to take a leadership role in launching reform of the system.

The absence of process leadership usually shows up in a lethargic, strangled agency. The administrative systems drain managers' energy and consume their time. The pace slows, frustration increases, and morale goes down.

Every day at every level, the government provides employees with leadership opportunities. But too few employees seize these opportunities. Instead, they ignore them as being outside their job descriptions or being someone else's problem. Yet many in government have made a difference. The difference may have been a small one, but multiply that by a hundred or a million, and you dramatically increase the level and quality of performance in government. Like war, the performance of government is too important to be left solely to the generals. □