NORMATIVE EDUCATION: PUTTING THE PUBLIC SERVANT IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Mary Ann Feldheim
Department of Public Administration
University of Central Florida

Gail Johnson
Department of Public Administration
Evergreen State College

Abstract

Two distinct approaches to public service and public service education can be identified – the rational approach and the normative approach. This article advocates the use of the normative approach to education, which would focus on developing stewardship, honesty, integrity, democratic participation, social equity, and benevolence. Using the humanistic techniques of servant leadership, educators and professionals would role model these values through authentic communication, while recognizing the ethical implications of all their decisions and actions.

Introduction

A normative approach to public service education focuses on stewardship, honesty, integrity, social equity, and democratic participation in all aspects of administration. This approach encompasses the ideals of Frederickson's (Frederickson, 1996) new public administration, Denhardt and Denhardt's (2000) new public service, and the American Society of Public Administration's (ASPA) Code of Ethics. The public administrator, educated using this normative approach,

becomes a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1980), who is motivated by a concern for the well-being of others, rather than by self-interest focused on personal gain.

In this paper two approaches to public service are identified – the rational and the normative approaches, and the components of the normative approach are developed. Second, the link between public service and servant leadership is established, and the need for normative education is made based on the work of Kohlberg (1981). Then we develop a normative paradigm of public service that utilizes the core beliefs of servant leadership, and we identify individual strategies to implement this paradigm shift in public service and public service education.

Rational Public Service

Two distinct approaches to public service can be identified, the rational and the normative approaches, based on the public sector motivational framework developed by Perry and Wise (1990). The rational approach to motivation is based on utility maximization with individuals oriented toward economic self-interest focusing on economic rewards (Perry, 1996; Perry and Wise, 1990).

The rational approach to public service is supported by agency theory, contract theory, shareholder value maximization, public choice theory, and transaction cost theory. The reinvention of government movement, along with revitalization, and reengineering that dominated the public management literature in the 1990s focused on changing the culture of government operations to the rational, economic model (Frederickson, 1997; Hays and Whitney, 1997). However, several authors have stressed

the need to take another approach and to focus on other values (Fox, 1996; Frederickson, 1997; Deleon and Denhardt, 2000; Schachter, 1997; Terry, 1993, 1998). The alternative to the rational approach is a normative one, which will be discussed in the next section.

Normative Public Service

In this approach to public service, two categories of motives (norm-based and affective) are combined into what has been called the public service ethic. First, norm-based motives are rooted in a desire to serve the public interest, requiring individuals to act as trustees of the state's power. Second, affective motives for public service are seen as compassion or love for all people and a willingness to sacrifice personal need to meet the needs of a larger public (Perry, 1996; Perry and Wise, 1990).

Perry and Wise (1990) believe that normative public service motivation consists of "a desire to serve the public interest, loyalty to duty and to the government as a whole, and social equity" (Perry and Wise, 1990, p. 369). This normative approach to public service is identified as the "public service ethic." Brewer (2000) writes, "this public service ethic is thought to attract certain individuals to government service and foster work behaviors that are consistent with the public interest" (Brewer, Selden, Sally, and Facer, 2000; p. 254).   This ethic of service has been envisioned as an attitude, a sense of civic duty, and a sense of public morality (Buchanan, 1975; Staats, 1988), which is norm-based motivation. However, others identify the public service ethic with affective motivation seeing the desire to serve the public as altruistic (Downs, 1967), which can be understood as the "process of getting pleasure from giving

to others what you yourself would like to receive" (Vaillant 1974, cited in Harvey 1999). Another way of describing the public service ethic is as"patriotism of benevolence" expressed as a love for people within the country (Frederickson and Hart, 1985).

At its simplest, this public service ethic is based on altruism over self-interest. In the past, research indicated that public sector employees are more interested than private sector employees in altruistic and ideological goals, such as helping others rather than in monetary rewards (Rainey, 1982). However the predominance of the rational approach to public administration at the end of the 20th century ignored the altruistic components of public service, prompting Frederickson (1996) and Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) to articulate the normative approach as either *new public administration* or *new public service*.

In 1996, Frederickson advocated that the profession de-emphasize the market values of the reinventing government movement and focus on new public administration. He argued for a profession that has a more humanistic and democratic focus concerned with institution building, professional competence and with matters of justice and fairness or social equity.

Denhardt and Denhardt in 2000 developed the new public service model based on democratic citizenship, community and civil society, organizational humanism, and discourse theory. The new public service model advocates that public administrators serve the public interest by helping citizens articulate and meet identified shared interests. Key elements of the model are citizen and staff empowerment marked by respect, authentic communication, integrity, and responsiveness**.**

By combining key elements of the public service

ethic and the work of both Frederickson and Denhardts' normative models of public service can be articulated. A normative approach to public service focuses on stewardship, honesty, integrity, social equity, and democratic participation in all aspects of administration. This approach is very similar to the servant leader theory of leadership that is based on authentic interactions, empowerment, and integrity. Servant leadership is an established normative model with proven humanistic techniques for interactions that can provide a leadership structure to achieve the aims of the normative approach to public service in both management and education.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf (1980, 1996a, 1996b) described servant leadership as providing for the needs of others while leading by showing the way. True leadership emerges from a desire to help others. Servant leadership stresses the need for individuals to interact in authentic ways, which is envisioned as feelings of respect for others that are aligned with actions of respect. The strategies of authenticity are active listening, attending behaviors, empathy, and being fully present (Rinehart, 1998). Authentic behavior naturally leads to integrity, where an individual acts in moral ways that are consistent with what he or she believes and communicates. A servant leader focuses on the process of living, not just the outcome of interactions and relationships. The healing process is stressed in interactions demonstrated by a caring, nurturing attitude that affirms and encourages the other person (Greenleaf, 1996a; Spears, 1995).

Increasingly the public administration literature

calls for professionals to act authentically and with integrity with citizens and with employees (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; King and Stivers, 1998). Servant leadership is based on individuals behaving in these ways, but more importantly thinking in terms of being authentic and being honest with both themselves and with others.

Moral Assessment

As the profession debates the value of both the rational and the normative approaches, the question now becomes "Why should the profession move from a very rational economic approach to a more normative one based on the public service ethic?" To answer this question, a compelling argument can be made by using Kohlberg's (1981) three stages of moral development -- the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional stages that come to bear in relationships and in decision-making. The basic minimum standard for interaction is encompassed by the preconventional stage, where individuals act in response to self-interest or power using a quid pro quo relationship. In the conventional stage, individuals move to a higher level of moral functioning, and decision-making and interpersonal relationships focus on social norms and on obeying the law. The highest level of moral functioning is envisioned as the postconventional stage, where the social contract and belief in universal ethical principles guide social relationships. Basic universal ethical principles for relationships include honesty, integrity, and justice or fairness.

Using these stages of moral development to conduct a moral assessment of the approaches to public service, the rational approach, based on the assumption that individuals

are motivated solely by self-interest and by the use of organizational power, is the lowest form of moral development -- the preconventional stage. In contrast, the normative approach combines the two higher stages of moral development – the conventional and postconventional stages. Conventional moral development based on following the law, supports norm-based motivation with its focus on civic duty, the constitution, the democratic process, and effective public policy. Affective motivation for public service seen as love, caring, justice and social equity, is the epitome of the postconventional stage of moral development.

Based on this assessment, we see that the motivations for public service - rational, norm-based, affective --cover all of the stages of moral development. For many years, the rational approach predominated the profession in its desire to be value neutral, but by doing so, the noble, moral reasons for public service were downplayed or ignored. We believe the public service ethic should be supported, nurtured and developed through the educational process, which is a point made by several other authors.

Education's Challenge

Sherwood (1997) asserts that the image of a government charged with representing and defending the public interest declined during the last 30 years paralleling a decline in public service professionalism. Public service professionalism is based on sound moral insight and reasoning along with the integrity to act, to profess, and to serve public values. Sherwood argues that the education of public servants should be changed markedly to focus on the

development of professionalism by helping the professional to be more aware of his or her own values, potential to contribute, and responsibility to serve the public. Professionals who model the behaviors of exemplary public service and support its values are needed for professionalism to grow.

Brown (1998) links the legitimacy crisis in public administration to the co-opting of the public service and to the economic model and the abandonment of the Progressive idealism that focused on improving society. Educational programs, by not making a moral argument for public service and for the values of the public service ethic, are partly to blame for this legitimacy crisis according to Brown.

Denhardt and Denhardt's normative model was built on work in democratic citizenship, organizational humanism and discourse theory, and civil society. The primary role of the public servant is one of service to achieve, maintain, and protect the public interest. However, their *new public service* model is presented theoretically; and the specific techniques, required to move the profession toward realization of the model, are sparse. We believe the change must begin on a personal level and then move to all areas of public service education with the intent of helping to nurture a new generation of public servants, who can articulate the values of the normative approach to public service and demonstrate the behaviors of servant leadership.

Individual behavior is very important to the concept of servant leadership, because it is based on leading by example. To develop the normative paradigm of public service, one must begin with the individual. The motives of the individual for public service must be acknowledged and

affirmed, while the skills to be a servant leader are developed through the educational process and by the role modeling of those in positions of authority.

Creating Individual Change

Realistically, change occurs one individual at a time until a critical mass exists that moves the group toward a new way of thinking and acting. Several steps are proposed to initiate individual change in the process of educating public administrators. We recognize that many individuals already demonstrate these behaviors in the classroom and the profession, however, we try to combine the strategies and techniques into a comprehensive whole that can provide the profession guidance in developing educational programs that promote the public service ethic.

Step One- Awareness of the Underlying Assumptions

Individuals must first become aware of their own thinking and the underlying assumptions of that thinking. In the postmodern view of the world, reality and truth are subjectively constructed. The theories and constructs individuals use have ethical implications and consequences. Each decision an individual makes assumes a construct reflecting an ethical stance (Cunningham and Weschler, 2002). Critically examining our assumptions and the meaning of those assumptions promotes an ethical awareness among professionals.

When administrators and educators use the economic model solely, they are operating at Kohlberg's (1981) preconventional level of moral development. Organizations and educational programs that focus

predominantly on the rational model communicate to students that all interactions and relationships are based only on self-interest, which generates a cynical perspective on life. This cynical perspective is translated into thoughts and actions that downplay and even ridicule anyone who is brave enough to express a desire to serve the public interest in an altruistic way. By taking an inventory of our personal beliefs about the profession and the assumptions that support those beliefs, we can place ourselves on the public service continuum somewhere between the rational, norm-based, and affective dimensions.

Step Two – Acknowledgement of Assumptions

After identifying our assumptions regarding the motivation of individuals to become public servants and the values we hold for the profession, we need to reconcile our beliefs with our actions. Clear communication with colleagues and students on our view of the profession is the next step in moving toward a normative public service paradigm. Intuitively we gravitate toward individuals who hold like beliefs, but we may not have always been completely honest with ourselves or with others. Here the concept of authenticity that is central to the servant leadership paradigm comes into play.

Step Three – Become Authentic

The next step is to become authentic and to demonstrate authenticity in our interactions with others, acting as a role model for students. But what does it mean to be authentic? From the literature on servant leadership to be authentic means to be fully present in the moment and to respect others who share that moment. Authenticity is demonstrated through active listening, attending behaviors, empathy, and being fully present (Rinehart, 1998). Authenticity comes from increased awareness of others and

from an awareness of how our actions affect others.

Authenticity is rare in our society. Very few of us have experienced another who is focused completely on what we are saying and communicates a supportive environment for sharing to occur. It is also difficult to be fully present and attentive to others. Often in communicating with others we are trying to think of what to say next, or we are thinking of all the other things we have to do. In our everyday lives of multi-tasking, giving someone our complete attention is seen as wasting time.

As administrators and educators, we must first become aware of our own actions. How can we demonstrate attending behaviors and appreciation for the use of space in communication or proxemics? First, we must create a space for authentic conversation to occur. To do this, it may be necessary to let go of the planned agenda, and attend to the issues and concerns that are raised by others. This means giving up control, which is not an easy thing to do when your assumption is that you are responsible for everything that goes on within that setting. Yet, active listening and attending behaviors are needed to demonstrate the skill—to model the desired behavior. More explicitly, we need to teach effective communication.

Communication in the servant leadership paradigm moves from coercion or pressure and manipulation to persuasion. With persuasion, an individual arrives at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through his or her own intuitive sense. Individuals who function in organizations of power such as universities and governmental agencies often use communication to coerce and manipulate beliefs or actions. Conscious decisions must be made by individuals to communicate with a focus on persuasion (Greenleaf, 1996a).

Another part of authenticity is that it requires a person to be honest and open to risk. What may need to occur is that the profession develop a new definition of self-sacrifice, which recognizes that their is sacrifice in being vulnerable by sharing our emotions and feelings. The result of authenticity, listening, and empathy is that healing can occur for all individuals in the interaction. Role modeling based on the work of Bandura (1977) is one of the most effective ways that people learn, but for individuals to be successful in learning new behaviors, they must have opportunities to practice them in non-threatening environments. Collaborative problem solving and the conscious exploration of the personal dimensions of work are other strategies that can be utilized at the individual level.

Training in authentic communication that seeks to understand and to persuade sounds simplistic, but it is imperative. King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) call for authentic public participation and describe the participation in terms of how it stimulates interest and investment by all parties involved. The focus is on a commitment to open and honest communication, which builds trust between the parties. Process and outcome are equally important for authentic participation to be effective as the decision emerges as a result of effective communication. Authentic public participation requires the administrator to engage in servant leadership, role-modeling the behaviors of authenticity, empathy, effective communication, and healing.

Step Four – Live by the Code of Ethics

As professionals, our code of ethics should be more than rhetoric to create trust in the profession. The American Society for Public Administration's (ASPA) Code of Ethics

(1994) should be the framework for our interactions in the workplace, the educational setting, and in all other settings. When we examine our code of ethics, we find that the basics of servant leadership are identified, as well as the components of the public service ethic.

First, the ASPA Code of Ethics commits professionals to the principle of serving the public interest, which has always been one of the primary motives for entering the public service (Perry, 1996). Serving the public interest is stewardship, which is defined as the holding of something in trust for another in a responsible way. Stewardship is a major component of the servant-leadership literature, which urges individuals to consider the impact of their actions on the public and the community (Greenleaf, 1996; Spears, 1995).

Greenleaf (1980) believed the big problems of society-- poverty, destruction of the environment, and discrimination--represented individual and institutional failures. He believed that too many institutions were deficient in their service to society and lacked a vision that could inspire people to reach toward the future with hope and energy. The standard of success for individuals, organizations, and policies according to Greenleaf is their impact on the least privileged in society. This focus is consistent with Frederickson's (1997) view of public regard, which means a movement from self-interest to an understanding and concern for the interests of others, and the work of Rawls (1971) who defined justice in terms of making the least off better.

Second, the Code of Ethics identifies the principle of respecting the Constitution and promoting the constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness, responsiveness, and due process in

protecting citizen rights. Equality and fairness are values that a servant leader seeks to establish with the available resources and through the existing institutions that exist to serve society (Greenleaf, 1996a; Greenleaf, 1996b).

In the normative approach to public administration, the highest priority is placed on the equitable provision of public services. The behaviors that will allow this to happen are found in humanistic, democratic, participatory administration (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; Frederickson, 1996; King and Stivers, 1998), which place value on the process of interaction between public servants and those who are served, which is fundamental to servant leadership. Quality interactions between individuals and groups based on authentic communication and action is as important as the outcome of the interactions. Democratic participatory administration also incorporates the value of democracy and advocates the creation of mechanisms to encourage and enhance citizen participation. Public administrators working within governmental institutions have a role to play in bringing about a more just and caring society, and educators have a role in teaching the techniques to achieve these goals.

Third, the Code of Ethics asks for the demonstration of personal integrity by the public servant. Heroes do exist and they need to be identified and held as models for the profession and students to emulate and to instill an appreciation for the values of the profession (Cooper and Wright, 1992). The balance between efficiency and integrity needs to be explored and discussed. This allows educators to capture the hearts and minds of students, and to inspire and reaffirm those who come to public administration to serve.

Fourth, the Code of Ethics speaks to the promotion

of ethical organizations, strengthening organizations by applying ethical decision-making in addition to the efficiency and effectiveness that have dominated the curriculum for so long. Participative management and the humanistic movement seek to empower both the employees and the citizens. The servant leader literature and the public service literature advocate the *empowerment* of both employees and citizens/customers. Empowerment as the term is used in this context refers to decision-making power, which is shared by employees and citizens. The new public administration, the reinvention movement, and the new public service espouse the value of empowerment of employees and citizens in public decision-making. Feedback is a necessary component to citizen involvement: extensive use of surveys, hearings, citizen councils, and participatory program evaluations are tools that can be used to engage citizens. Public "listenings" and dialogue may provide a more powerful way to engage in authentic communication and citizen involvement. Empowerment in the servant leadership literature focuses on developing people in ways that empowers them to make their own decisions (Rinehart, 1998).

Appreciative inquiry provides another approach to engage people in evaluation and sense making. It is an alternative to the rational economic model of evaluation by focusing on the accomplishments of an organization not its deficits. In appreciative inquiry, program evaluation data is gathered through initial interviews between participants that focus on developing a profound understanding about core values and what already works well in their organization or community. A shared vision is created through dialogue in small groups and validated by the larger group. Where the group has identified a gap between the vision and the current situation, participants self-select into small groups to identify strategies to move

the current situation closer to the shared vision. By understanding what already works well, they can develop strategies to ensure things work well more consistently throughout all parts of the organization or community (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Johnson and Leavitt, 2001).

Servant leadership focuses on responsibility for the community under the umbrella of stewardship. Responsibility is an attitude or feeling where the quality of the lives of others becomes very important, and every action of the servant leader is directed toward improving that quality through actively seeking to involve people in the decision-making processes of organizations (Greenleaf, 1996a; Greenleaf, 1996b).

The measures of success are quite different if servant leadership and ethical principles are used as the standards when examining programs and policies. Instead of measuring success by how much power has been acquired by one or more interest groups, the servant-leader's measurement of success is whether those served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely to become servants leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 1980). This definition of success echoes the recent stance of leaders in the field of public administration, who advocate the encouragement of democratic citizenship (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; King and Stivers, 1998). This also reflects the work of Mary Parker Follett (1927) who saw democratic governance as necessary in complex relationships, and the work of King and Stivers (1998) who focus on "government of the people: the process of collaboration in which active citizens and administrators work together . . . in ways that allow new perspectives and approaches to emerge…." (King and Stivers, 1998: p. 203).

Lastly, the Code of Ethics focuses on strengthening individual capabilities and encouraging the professional development of others. Mentoring is one way that this can be accomplished within the classroom setting and in all public service settings. Again being a role model is inherent in the servant leadership literature demonstrating to students and practitioners how to appreciate and function at the normative end of the public service continuum.

Step Five – Becoming a Servant Leader

This article proposes a bottom-up method of balancing the rational and the normative approaches to public administration using the tools of servant leadership. When an individual makes the decision to become a servant leader within his or her organization and incorporates the normative values of the profession into his or her work, the critical mass of the profession moves toward a more balanced approach to public service. According to Green leaf (1980), it is the vision of serving others that begins the transformation. For too many years the modernist focus on rational, value neutral, public service has held sway, and resulted in preconventional moral behavior, and eroded the profession's and the public's perception of public servants. As professionals, we should acknowledge both the rational and the normative approaches to the profession, but we have a responsibility to nurture and develop the normative motivation of individuals drawn to the field, thereby tipping the balance toward conventional and post-conventional moral thinking.

Conclusion

This paper presents an argument for taking a normative approach to public service education based on

servant leadership. By focusing the development of servant leadership, educators and professional can lift the profession to higher levels of moral thinking and decision-making. For this change to occur individuals must become aware of the underlying assumptions of the theories and techniques they use and teach. Once the assumptions are identified, they should be examined using the stages of moral development and be openly acknowledged. Next, a conscious decision must be made to embrace the normative aspects of the profession and to become an authentic person. This is the most difficult and heroic aspect in moving the profession toward the normative end of the public service continuum. Being open, vulnerable, and caring are challenging behaviors in institutions that may not support interaction in these ways. The importance of role modeling these behaviors for both others in the organization and for students is stressed.

The vision of public service based on stewardship, honesty, integrity, social equity, and democratic participation in all aspects of policymaking is one to be proud of. This vision has inspired many to public service, and it is our obligation as professionals and educators to maintain the vision and to provide the tools to help the vision become the reality of public service.

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Biographical Sketches

Mary Ann Feldheim is currently the Interim Chair for The Department of Public Administration at The University of Central Florida. She is also a professor for the department. She can be reached by email at mfeldhei@mail.ucf.edu.

Gail Johnson is currently a professor for The Department of Public Administration at Evergreen State College. She can be reached by email at johnsong@evergreen.edu.