

# Civilian Leadership in Government



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There is a tendency to think of leadership as an independent, public, and sometimes heroic manifestation of traits like charisma or decisiveness. A more honest picture reflecting leadership in a non-crisis situation is more sublime. Within government, civilian leader-managers must bridge their actions with knowledge of what employees want, engage with each member of the staff to accomplish the next step, and maintain a clear view of what staffwork is needed to finish the job.

### Emphasis on productivity and knowledge

Today's conditions for organizational accomplishment have changed, with an emphasis in government even more focused on knowledge, productivity, and process. The leader-manager's behavior and interaction with the staff are critical elements of ensuring that focus is maintained. Since all leaders are closely observed by staff, the leader-manager needs basic knowledge of theories about productively managing a group's work, motivating and supporting each individual doing that work, and more than a casual awareness of the interpersonal processes that make that happen. Individual differences can account for different reactions to new initiatives, but that is no reason for today's leader to ignore theories about behavior, or to neglect paying individualized attention to every employee who, in the final analysis, contributes, or doesn't contribute, to the goals of the organization.

By being aware, the leader recognizes the importance of the leadership role, and the fact that this role is critical, since the leader is also looked upon for guidance and direction by the staff. In a policymaking setting, managing by leading requires a broad, inclusive view of where policy fits into the overall goals of the organization, as well as a sense of how to consolidate different behaviors to get the required outcome. This sense of how to consolidate behaviors can only be supplied by the leader-manager, and his or her proactive efforts to obtain optimal performance from each employee.

### Envisioning a Preferred Future

In other words, leaders in public organizations are in a dynamic, often very visible position. They therefore must make connections between their knowledge of behavior and their knowledge of differences among the staff. These two elements are major links in accomplishing the work. Having (or developing) effective skills in human relations, in observing individual interaction, and integrating differences among staff requires a working knowledge of theory and practice in providing consistent support to each employee and integrating different staff behaviors to most likely assure successful outcomes. This requires a particular, hands-on, on-your-feet type of leadership and awareness. The leader-manager must act with confidence when interacting with the staff, and readily respond to their challenges with trust and collaboration. When that happens, the leader will often gain support from the staff that adds to and facilitates accomplishment of the work. And, by empowering staff in this way the leader helps them proceed down a path that develops their own ability to communicate successfully with higher authority; to improve collaboration with other offices for future endeavors;

and to see the important role that cooperation plays in accomplishing work. This bridging effort must become a top priority for the leader-manager. Enabling employees is the functional skeleton by which the leader accomplishes essential bureaucratic and programmatic functions in the workplace.

What the leader brings to the table is a view toward the future. For the governmental organization to sustain itself, and to continue to function, the leader-manager must have a vision of the future. This vision must include consolidating different inputs from the staff. Compare it to a well-functioning automobile, in which each part, though different from the others, makes an important contribution in getting to the destination. Those functions consist of informing the driver, attaining good mileage, keeping the tires inflated, staying in motion, and stopping when required. To continue the analogy, outputs from the office might be enhanced by a GPS-like vision that informs the leader of what the future might look like, and what steps, or interventions, he or she may take when making demands on the staff. In turn, the vision is regularly refreshed by suggestions about the best and most likely ways to proceed.

Today's conditions for governmental accomplishment are changing, with growing emphasis on productivity and competence in a diminished-resources setting, and for demonstrated leadership that gets high performance out of the staff. This knowledge-based reality demands managerial performance that will create the right conditions, provide transparency to those in the office and outside it, and earn sustained trust. The leader who continues to rely on outdated models of leadership and influence risks losing credibility in today's larger public framework for policymaking and daily operations. Accomplishing goals and ensuring successful implementation is the new mantra, and developing innovative means of accomplishment through a limited staff that possesses necessary knowledge is the balancing act required. Leading has become more demanding in that sense, and managing is more inclusive.