

Managing People in Public Agencies

PERSONNEL AND
LABOR RELATIONS

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Personnel and Labor Relations

Little, Brown and Company

Boston Toronto



Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Brock, Jonathan, 1949-

Managing people in public agencies.

1. Civil service — United States — Personnel management.
2. Civil service — United States — Personnel management — Case studies.
3. Civil service — Personnel management.

I. Title.

JK765.B68 1984 353.006 83-18701

ISBN 0-316-10889-8

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 83-18701

ISBN 0-316-10889-8

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Published simultaneously in Canada by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited

Printed in the United States of America

Preface

A Managerial Perspective

Unlike much of the material in public personnel management, this book emphasizes the role of the program — or line — manager rather than that of the personnel officer. It emphasizes accomplishment of public programs rather than technical personnel activities, such as classification, or specific areas of law, such as labor law or affirmative action. Yet, technical personnel activities, labor relations, and affirmative action are dealt with in the book — but from the perspective of a program manager. Although the book provides the necessary exposure to the technical and procedural side of government personnel management, those areas are treated in the context of providing better services and of improving employee satisfaction, not as ends in themselves. The book is intended to develop judgment and abilities for managing people within a variety of programmatic, bureaucratic, and political settings, and to develop skills and strategies for dealing with various experts and other “actors” who might otherwise restrain a program manager’s range of action.

A Case Approach

To serve these purposes, this volume relies largely on case studies, which allow students to view human resource management as one part of a manager’s overall approach to delivering effective public services. Suggested readings provide some basic managerial and behavioral concepts helpful in analyzing each case. (More experienced audiences usually have less need for such readings.) The cases provide typical management problems set within their typically complex political and organizational environments. Discussion and analysis of the cases by students and professors provide the forum through which useful lessons can be gleaned.

Twelve of the fourteen cases are drawn from typical governmental personnel situations. They deal with real and recent problems and were selected and written with the concept of this book in mind. In addition, two cases are drawn from business settings on issues for which good cases from a public agency were not available, or where the differences in tradition or approach suggest additional lessons or techniques for public managers.

In order for students to obtain the necessary technical knowledge, most of the cases contain excerpts from applicable personnel regulations in areas such as classification, reduction in force, labor contracts, and the like — information too boring to be tolerated on its own. By making these technical issues part of the case, students are forced to tackle them as they attempt to resolve the managerial problem. They thereby can become adept at understanding or influencing the impact of these regulatory constraints on a manager's options and obligations.

In resolving the case problems, students must also consider means of developing constructive working relationships with those who can influence their ability to manage effectively — including personnel specialists, budget officers, union leaders, political officials, and others.

In concentrating on the manager as the link between program goals and effective management of people, the book aims to help managers identify the managerial tools, personnel management strategy, and style appropriate to each program, organizational, or political context in which they find themselves. Different cases suggest different styles and judgments depending on the problems and opportunities at hand.

The book also recognizes that personnel decisions can be difficult to make and implement, especially when the issues are complex, time is short, or pressure from other quarters is strong. Thus, studying the approach in the first two chapters and then working through the cases will help students develop better diagnostic abilities, quicken their analysis, and add depth to their decisions in personnel matters. Developing practical solutions is emphasized. Study of this book also offers a means of developing criteria to guide decisions that must be made under severe or competing pressures.

Organization of The Book

A personnel management problem rarely presents or resolves itself simply as a "compensation" problem or a "promotion" problem. Rather, management situations have many interactive elements and a variety of possible consequences. Yet, from a learning standpoint some topic-by-topic focus seems necessary. Therefore, although cases from other parts of the book may touch on some similar points, each part of the book and each case focuses on a different aspect of personnel management, without sacrificing the richness of the real situation depicted. The lessons progress from case to case, solidifying and integrating management tools and concepts, developing analytic and diagnostic abilities, and using the cultural and technical knowledge from analysis of previous cases to work on each new case.

The introductions and questions preceding each case are intended to highlight the major issues. These introductions are brief, leaving to the student the process of analysis and discovery. The cases present real situations in which the manager had no assignment sheet — and so it will be for future managers.

This book will easily fill a quarter or a semester course covering the basic

issues of public sector human resource management. This material is assembled as a survey course in which a wide range of personnel management problems is presented. Cases or readings may be added or deleted to fit the time available, coverage desired, or other instructional criteria. Each case can be taught at a level of conceptual or operational detail appropriate to the course, audience, or time constraints.

Civil Service Reform

The Federal Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and parallel state and local reforms were taking place as this material was first developed and taught, and much of it explicitly reflects post-reform issues. Thus, the advent of civil service reform motivated inclusion of the case on the "Merit System Protection Board" and the material on performance appraisal, an important and often confusing subject. The remaining material focuses on developing universal tools for analysis and problem solving in personnel matters.

Genesis and Limitations

This material is largely a product of the four years I spent on the faculty of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It has been taught to hundreds of graduate students, ranging in age from 20 to 61, at major universities. Some students had substantial work experience and some did not. Selected portions have been used in special programs for in-service executives from various state and local governments and from a plethora of program areas.

As I was leaving government in 1977, I consulted respected government managers and observers to develop a list of the human resource issues and skills with which a public manager ought to be most familiar. Lamenting the lack of good curricular material, I wrote or supervised cases where resources were available and where a manager and agency were willing to permit a case to be written. Inevitably, resources cannot support all one's ambitions, nor can a semester's course swallow them. However, a substantial portion of the original list is represented here. As one consequence of time and resource constraints, the preponderance of the cases are from federal agencies, a balance that could stand correction but that has not negated the material's value in teaching those students with state and local interests. Rather than wait until a more balanced set of cases was available, I decided to go ahead and publish this grouping. The purists may argue; in the meantime, students of management and those they manage can benefit.

Learning and Teaching

Learning with this collection comes not just from reading the words, but through careful, head-scratching analysis and discussion of the cases; through a search for realistic solutions; and through a systematic attempt by students and instructors to

distill the lessons from each case and apply them to the next case and to reality. Depending on experience and perspective, the lessons will vary in each class or for each student, but study and discussion will advance each student's thinking and consequent ability to handle real situations.

Typically, the study of these cases and the underlying concept of management has generated interesting, and often exciting, discussions on issues that, presented in other forms, often seem either too abstract or too pedestrian. When personnel management is related to the mission of a public agency or to the accomplishment or aspirations of a given manager, personnel management becomes a vital and interesting subject.

The course represented by this book has been challenging and fun to teach and — if student evaluations are to be believed — challenging and fun to take. It has demonstrated its practical relevance to managers in public agencies. That was my intent when research on the first case was begun. It is my continued interest, therefore, that this text contribute to the better training and awareness of public managers in managing people. The public deserves it, public employees deserve it, and managers owe it to themselves to gain the satisfaction of doing the best possible job for themselves, for public employees, and for the public.

Acknowledgments

This book owes its genesis to John T. Dunlop, Lamont University Professor at Harvard University, and over the last four decades, frequently a government manager. As an academic and as a practitioner, he recognized well the importance of "personnel questions" in public management and employment. He also saw these personnel management questions as intertwined with public policy formulation and implementation. Thus, my thinking and perspective have benefited greatly from my exposure to Professor Dunlop, as his junior colleague both in government and in the university. True to the principles of management delegation, Dunlop provided resources, encouragement, and wise counsel, yet left me to develop my own means of approaching the issue. To the extent that the work of public managers is helped by this collection and its offshoots, it is as a result of his astute observations of the workings of government and politics and his conception of the role of universities in helping to bring ideas to the practical work of government.

Through his efforts, funding came from the Ford and Sloan Foundations for the early cases and conceptual development; later from the program in Business and Government, sponsored jointly between the Harvard Business School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Dean Graham T. Allison of the Kennedy School provided an institutional home and encouragement for my efforts, and Dean John McArthur of the Business School had years earlier taught me the value of feedback by his example as a teacher and manager. Jared E. Hazleton, Dean of the School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington provided me with a peaceful year as a visiting faculty member that allowed the manuscript to be com-

pleted. It was my wife, Lois Schwennesen, who convinced me that the material, if worthy of a Harvard graduate program, perhaps deserved to be shown to a publisher.

Twenty years ago, the aborted presidency of John F. Kennedy kindled my awareness of the arts of governance and leadership, and of the importance of public service. Some years later, my understanding of government management was advanced by Dan H. Fenn, Jr., a warm and gifted teacher at the Harvard Business School and Director of the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library.

The hard work of Nancy Griesemer, Sue Forman, Tom Fagan, Rina Spence, Tom Sellers, and Phil Sharpless, who, under my direction, researched and wrote many of the cases, is acknowledged here, with admiration for their perseverance and dedication.

Many government managers, employees, and other colleagues contributed generously of their time and insight as the cases and concepts were developed. Among them were Bert Concklin, Roland Droitsch, Hank Perritt, Dave Kuechle, Bert Lewis, Dave Williams, Bill Usery, Jim Hibarger, John Heiss, Liz Gordon, Quinn Mills, Colin Diver, Wick Skinner, Mike Dukakis, the late Gordon Chase, Larry Lorber, Richard Shakman, Peter Bower, John Schwartz, Hale Champion. A special note of appreciation is given for the encouragement and example of my late colleague, Manny Carballo, the archetype of the practitioner/academician. Also helpful were many friends in the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA), whose publications director, Ken Fischer, circulated drafts of this material among members for technical and substantive review. An IPMA board member, Jack Golden, spent many hours introducing me to his colleagues and helping me understand better the role of personnel professionals in the government personnel process.

I received many detailed and thoughtful comments on the manuscript from faculty members at universities across the country: among them, David Lipsky, Duane Thompson, Walter Broadnax, Bill McGregor, Shirley Teeter, Jim Doig, Dick Loverd, Frank Havelick, Ben Burdetsky, James Perry, Gilbert B. Siegal, Mary Hall, and Fremont Lyden; and from countless former students. Captain Richard Martin provided an especially detailed review. Alexander Greene, my editor at Little, Brown, consistently provided thoughtful and helpful suggestions and support. The manuscript is greatly strengthened as a result of all their efforts. Any weaknesses remain only as a result of my own stubbornness and limitations.

I am especially indebted to my teaching assistants, who helped to integrate the use of the material and develop the teaching approaches to the cases. David Wilhelm's perception on management issues, his instincts for pedagogy, and his extreme dedication laid a firm foundation for structuring and teaching the original course. Kevin Murphy's help in refining the concepts added to the integration of the material. In the first year that I taught the course, Anne L. Spillane worked diligently against my centrifugal tendencies to keep the materials in a form and order upon which future work could be built. Mary Spillane provided an important suggestion concerning presentation of the conceptual framework in the book.

On other aspects of the work, Ele Jaynes added immeasurably to the quality of the cases with her skills in word processing, never complaining about numerous revisions. During the bulk of the project, Robin Berberian Bianchi was a loyal secretary to whom I owe a great debt for skill, calm, and good humor throughout. The text portions and final manuscript were prepared at the Business Service Center of Bellevue, Washington, under the competent direction of Tammy Erickson.

Finally, I will be ever grateful to my students, who motivated me as no manager could.

Jonathan Brock
Seattle, Washington
February 1984

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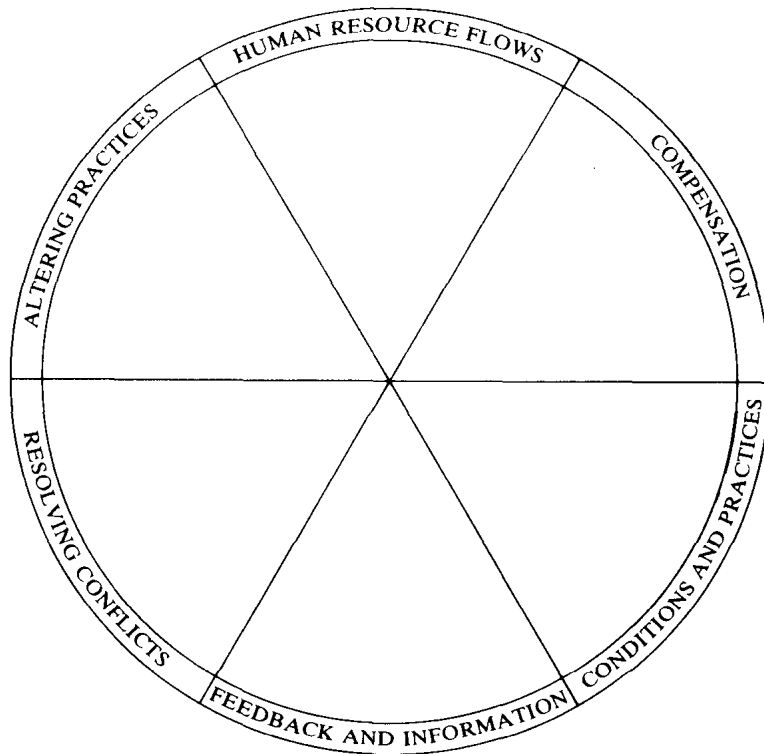
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Managing People in Public Agencies

PART I

Problems and Opportunities in Managing People

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- CHAPTER 1 Management in the Public Sector:
Tools and Constraints
 - CHAPTER 2 A Managerial Personnel System
 - CHAPTER 3 The Managerial Climate



Even well-developed policy ideas require implementation before they can serve a useful social purpose. Most government activity is carried on through the efforts of people. Therefore, the deployment, management, and motivation of human resources are critical to the success or failure of a government program or function — as well as to the success or failure of an individual manager. Because many of the formal and informal elements of personnel administration are not under the direct control of an individual manager, personnel management is an especially complex task in public agencies. Effective management of people is difficult enough in any setting, but management within civil service rules and within political, labor-management, and bureaucratic constraints is especially complex.

The object of the material in this book is to develop managers of public programs and functions. Through case studies, most of them depicting actual public managers, the book takes an integrated view of managing people in the context of program purposes and political and bureaucratic reality. The content, the order of the cases, and the underlying analytic scheme reflect conceptual, technical, and “cultural” knowledge that will be useful in a wide variety of managerial situations. Where appropriate and illustrative, comparisons are made with the private sector.

The cases focus on issues such as motivation, hiring, firing, compensation, performance evaluation, organizational change, and labor relations. While each case highlights a specific topic or managerial technique, the combination of them provides an overview of the formal and informal workings of public personnel systems as viewed by a manager. Taken together, the case collection develops managerial tools for diagnosing and resolving human resource problems in public management. This material also highlights the important power relationships between operating managers and other, often unexpected, actors and institutions who participate in the personnel management process. Overall, attention is focused on methods by which a manager can use these techniques, tools, and power relationships in the interest of program purposes, the organization, and its employees. While a later chapter considers the need for change in the formal systems and in other personnel management practices, the view of the book is that better results can be achieved even within existing constraints.

The first chapter in Part I provides an overview that describes typical problems and opportunities for a public manager in human resource management. The second chapter includes a conceptual framework that can be used to diagnose and make use of each agency's managerial environment as it affects the management of people. By presenting a case study about a controversial promotion, the third chapter in Part I illustrates this environment and the manager's role in it.