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# The Continuing Education of Public Officials in the Space Era

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THE CONTINUING EDUCATION OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS  
IN THE SPACE ERA

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Summary

Because of rapidly changing knowledge, technology, and urbanization there is a need for local public officials to increase their knowledge of government and to learn of new procedures to solve new problems. Private industry expects their personnel to continue to learn and these industries make provision for time and resources for their employees to continue to improve their skills. Local government has been lacking in this philosophy as well as lacking in the practical provision of time and resources for such activities.

However, a survey of public officials' continuing education activities in east central Florida revealed that an overwhelming majority of the public officials felt that additional educational opportunities to assist the public officials should be provided by associations of governmental officials, the Florida State University system and the junior colleges. Furthermore, a large majority of the public officials in east central Florida appear to be willing to participate in educational activities that will help them in their official duties. If these results are representative of attitudes of public officials across the nation, educational institutions are faced with the challenge and responsibility of providing for these educational needs. Florida State University's Urban Research Center and a voluntary organization of public officials in east central Florida are cooperatively laboring to develop meaningful educational activities for public officials in the region and this program may provide a useful model for other states and institutions.

The Continuing Education  
Of Public Officials  
in the Space Era

Rapidly changing knowledge, technology, and urbanization are among the most crucial social facts of this time. And the urban residents of the nation could be pictured as sometimes directing, but most often being pulled behind, a troika propelled by the effects of these three forces. The pell-mell dash of this trioka through the finite measurement of time has acquainted the populous with the effects of changes in scientific information that can send man to the moon and the industrial techniques that can harness the energy to get him there, but which have been applied with limited success to solving the social problems associated with governing the rapidly urbanizing area. They have felt the increasing requirements of personal competence imposed by the three powerful forces catapulting them through time with the attendant obsolescence of those who don't keep up. Yet

the implications that these forces have for public officials struggling to provide governmental services in such a whirlwind may not be fully appreciated.

The continuing education of public officials is one of those areas that contain unexplored implications and the importance of such activity will be increasingly apparent as the three social forces mentioned earlier continue to exert their influence on Americans. The impact of social change has not gone unnoticed. The Municipal Manpower Commission, formed by the American Municipal Association, American Society of Planning Officials and the American Institute of Planners, underlined the needs for improvement of personnel in a 1962 report. Their report indicated that the nation would be confronted with a host of problems stemming from urban growth and that governmental institutions are ill-prepared to make the necessary decision required to solve these problems. Furthermore, the 1962 Municipal Manpower Commission report suggested that the development of an enlightened and energetic civic leadership is essential to the creation of a new and better metropolis and that the personnel of local governments have an all-important part to play in this process. Because of the significance of continuing education for public officials the purpose of this paper is to, (1) consider briefly some of the practical implications concerning continuing education of all adults; (2) consider some of the practical implications involved in the continuing education of public officials; (3) consider implications of a recent survey conducted by the author among public officials in the East Central Florida Region concerning the continuing education of public officials; and to (4) review briefly one institutional provision that has been made to assist in the continuing education of public officials.

Practical Implications  
Concerning the Continuing  
Education of Adults in General

In contemporary society, education should provide avenues and areas in which responsible mature citizens can gain and evaluate new experiences that are appropriate to the constantly changing society. For example, Peter Drucker suggests that modern man's life pattern is undergoing an evolution.<sup>4</sup> He points to the fact that regardless of one's work, learning has not stopped with the end of schooling. It must begin anew in many ways; new concepts, new skills, new tools, new knowledge, etc. Furthermore, he suggests that a direct relationship will exist between success and the amount of new learning. And in his observations he joins a large

chorus of educators who suggest that there is a need for new commitments and new approaches to continuing education.

For an example of the concept that professionals may become obsolete without continuing education, one need only to turn to any of the space-technology oriented companies that serve NASA. These companies not only recognize the importance of continuing learning activities, they pay homage to the concept by providing space, time, or finances and sometimes all three for their employees to keep pace.

However, the major concern of this paper is not with the application of the concept of continuing education in general. Instead, this paper is primarily concerned with the need for new approaches and commitments to a specific concept of continuing education that merits additional attention; such as a commitment to the continuing education of public officials.

#### Practical Implications Concerning the Continuing Education of Public Officials

It has been previously observed that changing knowledge, technology, and rapid urbanization are crucial social factors of this time. There are few of the 200 million residents of the nation who do not feel the impact of the changing knowledge and technology that is exemplified by the Kennedy Space Center. There are few, if any, of the 200 million residents of the nation who do not feel the impact of rapid urbanization. And finally, there are none who escape the impact of government in this knowledge centered, technological oriented, urbanizing nation.

Thus, the ability of public officials to govern, the ability of public officials to provide for the general welfare, health, and safety of the 200 million inhabitants of the nation should be given serious consideration. This is not to imply that all public officials are incompetent. It does suggest that competency of public officials can be improved by a dedication to the concept of continuous learning.

At this point, it appears desirable to observe that while serious consideration be given to the competence of public officials throughout the nation, east central Florida will often be specifically referred to because of the proximity of old and new institutions, old and new concepts, the impact that the new is having upon the old, and the availability of research data concerning the region.

It is readily observed and accepted that an engineer with ten years experience who has not engaged in substantial re-education is likely to have less competence and value than a new engineering graduate.<sup>3</sup> Margaret Meade has speculated along similar lines concerning the competence of school teachers. She maintains that for the teacher "age and experience become not orienting factors but disorienting ones, so that the teacher of

twenty years experience may face her class less confidently than the teacher with two.<sup>3</sup>

Yet only a limited number of educators and governmental leaders have expressed concern for the need for re-education of public administrators whose actions touch every phase of the citizens' life. For some strange reason there is not a social ferment brewing over this strange state of affairs while there is a ground swell of unrest concerning obsolescence of skills at lower levels. This is not to imply that concern should not exist for the people who occupy lower levels of job classifications, classifications that are being phased out in wholesale numbers. However, it does appear that the social impact of obsolete public administrators is at least as great as the impact of similar obsolescence of members of a particular socio-economic group.

For some unknown reason few citizens have fully appreciated the magnitude of the mistakes that can be made by their state and local officials. Perhaps a few references to Rueben A. Zubrow's speech at the forty-first annual American Municipal Congress in 1964 will illustrate the potential magnitude of fiscal mistakes that could be made by public officials.<sup>9</sup> According to Zubrow state and local government accounted for eighty-five percent of all non-military public spending in 1963.<sup>9</sup> He provides additional information worthy of consideration by pointing out that during the decade preceding 1963 the federal civilian expenditures had been maintained at a rate of less than two percent of the Gross National Product. In the same period, state and local expenditures were steadily rising until they had exceeded ten percent of the GNP. For the nation as a whole the local jurisdictions accounted for expenditures of almost \$40 billion or two-thirds of the total non-federal spending. During the five year period between 1958 and 1962 the direct general expenditures of cities increased by approximately twenty-five percent while the combined spending of the non-municipal local units increased by almost fifty percent.<sup>9</sup>

Another fact that should underscore the significance of the practical implications involved in the concept of continuing education for public officials is the fact that approximately three out of every four Americans are now living in urban conditions. A change that has not only influenced the cities but society as well. Mayor James Tate of Philadelphia has noted the change and the implications in the change.<sup>8</sup> He says that the nation has gone through three phases that have made different demands on what he calls the political executive. He suggests that in the early nineteenth century the demands of government could be met by the average man of intelligence and integrity. Then, at a date not too long ago, there became a demand for technicians and engineers. And today, the third phase of development requires the specialist. He observes that the career technician replaced the drone, and the specialist in the

science of government has replaced the old-fashioned office holder whose sole thought was for winning the next election.

Tate adds that Philadelphia has profited from the availability of elected officers who knew not only what could be done but also how it could be done.<sup>8</sup> An apparent and important factor in the development of such a political executive as Tate describes is alertness and willingness to rise to the challenge through drive and initiative; characteristics of a continuous learner. Specifically he refers to success with urban renewal, the organization of the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and what he calls the most modern food distribution center in the entire world.<sup>8</sup>

Another governmental official who can cite practical results from a program of continuous learning for public officials is Vincent L. Bogart, Mayor of Wichita, Kansas. Bogart says that Wichita is able to perform common municipal functions with forty percent fewer employees than the average city in Wichita's population category.<sup>2</sup> Wichita maintains an exceptional continuing education program for municipal employees in cooperation with Wichita State University.

Furthermore, the Municipal Manpower Commission in 1962 discovered that all municipalities may not have sufficiently realized the value of continuing education. According to the results of their survey, less than one-third of the municipalities studied had training or development programs to improve the competence of their employees.<sup>7</sup>

John Bebout made some interesting observations concerning the re-education needs of public administrators in The American Behavioral Scientist. He said:

"In some ways, governors, mayors, department heads, legislators, city councilmen and other top elected and appointed officials are more in need of in-service training than people who ordinarily get it lower in the echelons of public service. This is partly because they often find themselves catapulted, with no particular preparation, whole into positions of great complexity, and partly because our educational system has somehow failed to come to grips with the problem of educating people for high politics. Add to these considerations the fact that tradition assumes that the mere designation to a high office, if it does not endow a person with the special vision required, at least makes it inappropriate for him to appear in the role of student, and we have a partial explanation for the frustration of public hopes and aspirations at the point at which they are translated into operative public policy. It is curious that high officials are assumed to have plenty of time to make all kinds of mistakes, but are not deemed to have time to learn how to avoid such mistakes."<sup>1</sup>

If one understands these conditions

then it becomes easier to understand how modern scientists can send a rocket to the moon while he lives in an environment that includes dangerous problems of transportation and conditions of pollution that threaten his health. If one wishes to understand why technology is constantly changing in space exploration and why such technology is seldom applied to improving governmental services, he need look no further than the educational requirements and the educational expectations in the two fields. This comparison will go a long way in explaining how Americans can land a rocket on a distant planet while they travel to work on streets filled with potholes and cluttered with debris.

One is motivated to speculate about a society that requires and/or expects continuing learning of its engineers and professors, and which even provides re-training for displaced employees but which is also a society that neglects the educational needs of public officials. And it may be observed here that in many instances re-education for public officials concerning their public trust must often be primary education, because, while many elected officials are eminently qualified in their first occupation they may not have the credentials for their current responsibilities.

#### Continuing Educational Activities of Public Officials in East Central Florida

Because of the significance of the concept of continuing education for public officials, officials in the East Central Florida Region cooperated in a survey to quantify educational participation rates and patterns among the officials.

The data collected from the public officials in the region is enlightening. Approximately 215 public officials, elected and appointed, were selected at random to serve as respondents. Sixty-three returned their questionnaires and thirty of those not replying were selected at random to determine the representative nature of the sample; twenty-five of these returned the questionnaire and three of the remaining five were no longer public officials. An analysis of the two sets of respondents led to the conclusion that the two sets were no different and that the responses could be accepted as representative of the population. Thus, our sample consisted of 88 respondents.

Preliminary Survey Results. The preliminary findings of the survey are as follows:

- 1) Twenty-five percent of the public officials attended an educational activity related to their public duties sponsored by a university in the past three years.
- 2) Seventy-five percent indicated that their local government is willing to pay expenses for short term educational activities that relate to

their official duties.

- 3) Eighty-eight percent cite one of the following three reasons for not participating in educational activities:

40% - No courses  
40% - No time  
8% - Lack of local approval

- 4) The mean length of time since public officials in east central Florida have been engaged in educational activity was 5.9 years.

- 5) Ninety-two percent indicated an interest in education activities related to their responsibilities as a public official.

- 6) A majority thought that additional educational opportunities for public officials should be provided:

69% thought the governmental associations should provide additional educational service;

71% believed that the Florida State University system should provide additional educational services for public officials

65% believed that the junior colleges should provide additional educational services for public officials.

- 7) One of the questions that contained the possibilities for very interesting responses was the one that asked if the public official felt that his formal education had adequately prepared him for the public office-- 65% said yes--was this a genotypic or phenotypic response?

- 8) Also of interest was the reply that 82 percent could cite other experiences that prepared them to hold office. Many of these responses concerned experiences that resulted in an understanding of human relations more than experiences that contributed to an understanding of the technical aspects of administering a government.

This survey suggests that the philosophy of continuing education for public officials has been tentatively accepted by the public officials in east central Florida. This acceptance should be strengthened by the development of an institutional form capable of providing a viable and substantial program of education for these officials.

Institutional Provisions  
For The Continuing Education  
Of Public Officials

The scientists of this area should appreciate a reference to comments made

by Lewis Mumford.<sup>6</sup> "The positive functions of government cannot be performed without creating new institutional arrangements, capable of coping with the vast energies modern man now commands... ." These necessary changes could hardly be envisaged without changes such as universal literacy, free education and open access to knowledge and the beginning of universal leisure such as is necessary for wide participation in political duties.

There are several examples of institutional provisions for the continuing education of public officials across the country. The New School for Social Research in New York City has its Center for New York City Affairs, the Miami-Dade Junior College in Miami, Florida, the University of Chicago, and the University of Delaware are examples of educational institutions that have developed sound instructional programs for public officials. While there are a score of institutions of higher learning with centers for urban studies, only a few are designed to provide educational assistance to public officials, the majority have objectives that focus on research and the education of regular students.<sup>1</sup>

Institutional Provisions For The Continuing  
Education of Public Officials in East Central Florida

Florida State University is currently providing leadership in the development of educational research activities concerning the needs of urban government. The Urban Research Center of Florida State University will provide face-to-face instruction and consultation to more than 2,000 public officials during the 1966-67 fiscal year.

At this point it is proper and fitting that recognition be paid to the avant garde public officials of the East Central Florida Region that are providing leadership and guidance to Florida State University's Urban Research Center. Through a voluntary organization known as Public Administration Continuing Education Service over fifty leaders from the region; city managers, mayors, city councilmen, county commissioners, and a host of others are working collectively to solve some of the problems discussed in this paper. Appropriate recognition should be given to such public officials lest the reader be inclined to place all public officials in one category.

It is a pleasure to observe that Florida State University, through the activities of the Urban Research Center supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, has been experimenting with a new institutional form to provide continuing education to public officials in east central Florida. Through the cooperation of the Public Administration Continuing Education Service, limited but significant steps are being taken to bring the resources of the university, other governmental organizations and private industry to the aid of public officials in east central Florida.

The educational program supported by the Urban Research Center of Florida State University and the Public Administration Continuing Education Service is aimed at developing two audiences; (1) first the audience composed of the public officials, and (2) secondly, the audience composed of community leaders that will either provide the future generation of public officials and/or provide the basis of support or opposition to the governmental activities in the region. The objectives of the program are (1) to provide the continuing educational services needed and (2) to develop an awareness for the need for continuing education.

This author has had the opportunity to assist public administrators in east central Florida frame a program of educational activities that recognizes the time limitations faced by the public administrator. However, the consequences of the program are functionally related to the participation of public officials and the support available from the university, other governmental divisions, and private industry.

Important factors that must be successfully woven into the fabric of this new institutional form are:

- 1) Availability of skilled leadership from the educational institutions, government, and private enterprise to assist in the development of basic educational services that are readily applicable to the needs of urban government.
- 2) The development of an attitude among public officials that produces a strong, favorable image of continuing learning activities; an attitude that places as much importance on the classroom as the official commission meeting room.
- 3) The development of an attitude of expectation among the electorate to expect and demand that their public officials keep abreast of technological and knowledge changes in other fields that could be applicable to urban government.
- 4) The development of policy that provides time and resources to be applied to the continuing education of public officials.

These factors will not be successfully woven into a viable institutional form without support from the educational institutions, private industry, government and the electorate. A statement by John W. Gardner is appropriate here "...the transformations of technology and the intricacies of modern social organization have given us a society more complex and baffling than ever before. And before us is the prospect of having to guide it through changes more ominous than any we have known. This will require the wisest possible leadership. But it will also require competence on the part of individuals at every level of our society."<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusions

Finally, a concluding observation should be made that concerns the original ability of the public officials. The other professional areas referred to in this paper have all been professional areas where the individual developed basic skills and understanding in his field prior to employment. With the exception of a few professional city managers, etc., public administrators have little or no special training for their governmental responsibilities prior to assuming office. If they compound this condition by failing to learn of the organism that they govern they cannot even be compared with the obsolescent engineer. The election of amateurs is no disgrace especially if there is safety in numbers. The disgrace develops when the amateur public official continues to supervise multi-million dollar projects for twenty years and remains an amateur. The democratic form of government insures the election of public officials who may be extremely skilled at winning friends and influencing people, but it does not prevent the election of public officials lacking in the skills and understanding required by complex government in an urban society. Thus the responsibility for the continuing education of public officials appears to be shared; it is incumbent on the individual official that he avail himself of the opportunity to continue to learn and it is an institutional obligation of higher education to provide an opportunity for the official to discharge this very important responsibility of his office.

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