

CASE STUDY  
Professionalism & Organizational Values  
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December 3, 2008  
THEORY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
POLS 6201-9D Fall 2008

This case study deals with the friction between government administrators, commercial interest groups and their closely allied elected officials. Deeply held personal convictions on the part of Don Kelly, a new library administrator, concerning professionalism and the role of the library in the community are considered. The first part of the study sets the stage by comparing and contrasting the principals in the Public Administration academic field with that of the Library Science field. Initially we find two personalities who have had exposure to both fields and seem to hold opposite opinions as to the relative importance of one over the other. The seasoned librarian, Dr. Fazio, recognizes the role that marketing plays in promoting library services and believes that the future of libraries lie in a more aggressive strategy to achieve higher library utilization. Don, a young professional in the library science field, has less experience in dealing with community issues, but has formal education in Public Administration in addition to his advanced degree in Library Science. He holds a more traditional view of a library's role in a community, and seems to deny the importance of key players that lie at the very heart of Public Administrative Theory.

A group of business leaders have put together a proposal to revitalize the downtown area and have gone to great lengths to develop a comprehensive plan that, on the surface, benefits the commercial interests' downtown and enhances the quality of life of the citizens of Chestnut Grove. The community leaders have expended a large sum of money and have commissioned two separate professional feasibility studies costing around \$200,000. We are lead to believe that the plan is in the final stages of approval and only needs buy-in by the new library administrator. In the case study, the characteristics of the community leaders are developed to illustrate their commitment to both the community and the revitalization plan.

The community leaders believe they are working in the best long term interests of the citizens and commercial interests of Chestnut Grove. It is a challenge for local government to address the changing patterns of consumer preferences in their communities. Downtown areas especially are vulnerable when customers move from the traditional shops to suburban strip malls and other shopping centers and regional malls. In small communities, dealing with competition from big retailers such as Wal-Mart is often a losing battle. The leaders are looking for ways to make the downtown area more consumer friendly with a variety of draws which included public institutions, entertainment facilities, and historical landmarks along with small commercial establishments.

Don's view of public administration in the local government in relation to the library was based on his view of the traditional role of a library in a community. This role, no matter how it is fulfilled, is also affected by the preferences of the residents of the community. The library competes with the other institutions in the community in capturing a share of the public's leisure time as well as being a resource for current information, directed research, and the traditional leisure time reading.

The community leaders were sincere in recognizing the important contribution and pivotal role that Don would play in the overall plan, however, in Don's view, the changes to the library's role were too much to take in at one time. But in the larger context of the downtown revitalization the changes to the downtown library were incremental. Don did not consider carefully the possible positive effects of the downtown plan on the basic mission of the library, only the departure from his traditional view.

From the viewpoint of the community leaders Don should have recognized that the library was an integral part of the community and accepted the need to adapt its mission to the

changing market realities. The library has a total of four facilities throughout the community and it would seem to be a waste of resources for the collections and services to be duplicated at each facility. It may have been feasible or even desireable to have each library specialize and serve different sectors of the library patrons. This would give the downtown library a distinctive role in the overall community development. Perhaps if the library downtown facility was able to expand and adapt, overall the public would be served and one of the other libraries that had the next favorable location could be expanded and improved and directed to serving more traditional library patrons.

The community leaders could have brought Don into the process earlier when plans were in the initial development stages. It seems they were too far along in the plan with the consultant work and specific components of the project and Don had been on the job a relatively short time. It can be assumed that the community leaders did not pursue the plan in total secrecy, and that Dr. Fazio would have been knowledgeable on some aspects of the library's role early on. In anticipation of having Don take over leadership of the libraries, she could have assigned him a more specific role as a community liaison to the local chamber of commerce. This would have avoided Don being blindsided by the plan. Dr. Fazio could have taken advantage of Don's MPA training and mentored him in the changing face of public institutional forces. With the proper direction, Don could have expressed his concerns early on, and marshaled members of the community and library patrons who supported his view of the role of the library.

Dr. Fazio certainly seemed like a very flexible administrator that would have worked with the community leaders on the downtown project. Indeed, she seems like the kind of person who would have taken a leadership role in shaping the course of the project. The grounds for

this conclusion are only alluded to in the initial paragraphs of the study. The initial proposal for the project obviously is well under way by the time that Don takes the helm at the library. What role or information Dr. Fazio could have provided in the studies cannot be known with any certainty, but her comment that the library could be turned into “ethnic restaurants mall” and be a commercial success is a little confusing. The library services would most likely be incompatible with such a use. Certainly fire codes would come into play with cooking equipment in close proximity with stacks of combustible materials. She was convinced that the librarian of the future would be thrust into a role that would involve marketing library services. Nonetheless, libraries must provide the basic services to the community regardless of citizens’ tastes in ethnic food.

Don’s position in opposition to the downtown plan may not have best served the library’s clients. As it is with other public institutions, a library’s role in a community must evolve with the changes that affect the people that they serve. One of the key jobs of a librarian is to monitor changes in all aspects of the community whether it has to do with the traditional or popular culture and make sure that the library continues to be relevant and current as a repository of the information that reflects this culture.

The role of marketing in the public sector is one of the primary considerations in considering the issues of this case. Increasingly, we have seen promotional campaigns for public services in the broadcast and printed media. These advertisements have gone beyond the standard public service announcements and actively promote the services of government agencies. Many agencies such as the post office have direct completion in the public sector. Often, there is not a high pressure sales campaign, but simply the availability of the public funded service, and how well the services are carried out. National and State Parks are another

example. Public utilization is the reason for being for many public institutions and they must be more active in promoting their natural advantages in the pricing of the subsidized services they offer. It is apparent from the professional appearance of these advertisements that the government has spared no expense in developing these promotional campaigns.

If I were in Don Kelly's position, I would deal with the situation differently. With both a MLS and a MPA degree, there would be some common ground or related theoretical concepts that I could draw upon. If not, I could develop and adapt some theory that would explain and inform the process of the development of the downtown area and the library's central role. From the initial meeting, I would voice my concerns and request to review all the plans and recommendations of the consultants. I would require the leaders of the community to be totally transparent in their dealings with the library.

Once the plan was totally open to public review, I would form a library commission if there wasn't one already. I would make sure that there was a well defined and appropriate mission statement for the library and make sure it was in concordance with the overall mission of the library's governing body. The requirements to modify the library's operation would have to be easily reversed and the condition that the accesses to the library would preserve the library environment and not encroach on the rights of traditional library patrons to enjoy the library facilities in quiet contemplation would not be negotiable.

In applying Public Administrative theories to this case study, we first need to consider whether or not the changes proposed by the local leaders were incremental. The changes to the downtown area involved a substantial investment for the community and changes that were proposed could not be easily reversed. However, from the standpoint of the businesses downtown, the changes represented a minor modification or adjustment in the way that

business is conducted. The main commercial interests, the mall, movie theatre, and other small shops could hope for a modest increase in their business. The changes in their view would probably not alter shopping habits of the customers in a negative way. For the library on the other hand, changing the pattern of traffic of non-library patrons through the library environment was a major change. The community leaders did not approach the library administrator, Don Kelly, with proposals that would be easy to adapt to the library's traditional service model.

According to Charles Lindblom, in his article "The Science of Muddling Through", the library administrator would not be able to judge the extent of the modifications on library patrons and other service patterns using the method of "successive limited comparisons". It seems that the initial proposal was asking the library administrator to sacrifice a deeply held value at the fundamental level. To Don Kelly giving up or substantially degrading the quiet environment that a library offers was too much to ask. If for example, the Library accommodated the local businesses in a limited way by promoting related books in the existing plate glass windows, Don could have judged this move toward commercialization with regular patrons as well as new ones that may be prompted to use library services because of the displays. The sanctity of library space would be preserved. If this move was successful, a next step, such as allowing a area for refreshments such as coffee or soft drinks could be a further accommodation that would please library patrons both old and new. This kind of successful accommodation can be seen in the merger of large book stores with nationally franchised coffee shops. Once again the principal of successive limited comparisons could be applied.

The conflict between Don's views of his professional status as a librarian of his career a conflicted with that of the broader view that he was a public administrator. He felt obligated to

serve the people in the community by providing traditional library services. According to John A. Rohr in "Ethics for Bureaucrats: An Essay on Law and Values", the administrator adopts "regime values" or values that are generally held by society. While Rohr deals with ethics, values, and professionalism in Public Administrative Theory in the broad sense, the local planning issue of the economic development of Chestnut Grove can be reflected within the frame work of Rohr's principals.

Rohr places professional education in general and public administrative education in particular as an essential starting point for an individual administrator. Of course, we may assume that most citizens and leaders of Chestnut grove value the economic development and aesthetic improvement of their community. The case study also dealt with Don's professional education in some detail and his on the job training exposed him early on to local planning issues. It was also clear that his commitment to the library science profession was much greater than his role as an administrator within the community. Indeed, Don's resignation seemed to be the only solution to the conflict between these values. Rohr confirms what students in public administration know very well. That is the problems involved in Public Administration are so broad and general, that no specific training or education will prepare administrators for the challenges they will face on the job in real world situations. This brings us to Don's Master of Library Science (MLS) degree. As an example, the program objectives of the MLS degree at the University of Alabama are listed here.

- Be able to anticipate trends and to effect positive change in the profession and the profession's role in society.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the necessity for a variety of services to meet the library and information needs of diverse populations.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the political and cultural environment in which librarians, libraries, and information centers function.

- Demonstrate an understanding of interpersonal interaction and organizational culture and the ability to choose actions and responses appropriate to specific situations. Be able to communicate cogently, clearly, and persuasively.

These objectives along with others that would support Don's traditional view point of the Library Profession. With this information we find even more unusual Don's attitude toward the downtown project.

Rohr cautions us that questions of ethics and normative theories become more uncertain in dealing with specifics. Don may support the general good in economic development and an attractive downtown, but if it means turning his circulation desk into a soda fountain, traditional library values will take over. Rohr also advises us that we should not let community or professional values "harden into a ridged ... orthodoxy". Don's professional training has provided him with the "method for discovering ...values [himself] and putting them into practice as [he sees] fit". Much of Rohr's analysis is in the context of "American Values" however, his principals apply in a meaningful if not limited way.

In "The Possibility of Administrative Ethics" Dennis F. Thompson deals directly with the act of resignation when values and sense of ethics diverge between the administrator and the organization. Traditionally administrative ethics were approximated by the "ethics of neutrality" and administrators should strive for neutrality, political or otherwise, when making decisions. When disagreements on policy or administrative matters arise, once the decision has been made, then the administrator must tow the organization line. Neutrality has some notable failures when the administrator must eventually be accountable to the public for the organization's decision. If Don had become a member of the downtown task force and he was not totally behind it, how could he take an active role in promoting and marshaling support among his library staff? If he bought in, how could he avoid responsibility if the project failed

in some major way? Being neutral is not an option because Don would have made a conscious independent moral judgment that the project was appropriate for the development of the downtown just by participating.

In the Chestnut Grove case, Don appears to have only two choices, join the group or resign. In many cases, resignation is not an option. Some administrators do not have the option of choosing resignation. Don was a young professional just beginning his career and job change was easy. Others with more vested in their jobs must work with the organization and rationalize their differences away. Thompson also uses the incremental model to explain why the ethics of neutrality do not work in actual group decision-making situations where compromise is necessary. If the downtown group had gotten Don to join, initial concessions would be small and incremental. They would be easy to agree to, but once the developmental ball gets rolling, practical experience tells us that many small changes accumulate and opposition becomes increasingly difficult.

Thompson's rationale seems to be right on the mark and appropriate to the situation in Chestnut Grove when he argues against the ethics of neutrality and resignation in the face of major disagreements on policy direction. What kind of government would we have if administrators resigned every time they disagreed with their organization? Those that would resign instead of line up behind something they felt was against their sense of personal ethics are the kind of people we need in government. In this respect Don had responsibility and specific obligations to his profession, his staff, and to the community in providing library services that was in line with his values and training. If he was absolutely against the library participation in the downtown modifications he should have stayed on and fought for his values.

We can see the merits in this course of action in theories of common sense and changes in organizations in general. After he resigned, he chose to remain a resident of Chestnut Grove. If he opposed the plan as the library administrator, how does he feel as a citizen? If there are others that are opposed to the plan, would he join them? Shouldn't he lead them? If a vacancy on the Library Board becomes available, shouldn't he serve his community and his profession by becoming a member of the board? In his job as librarian to the VA Hospital, there will be situations where he doesn't agree with the policy direction that the VA Library may take. When these cases arise and Don's library traditions are trampled upon will he resign again?

In his article Thompson gives us many actual examples in the Federal Government where choosing to oppose a policy and not resign. In its mildest form, Don could have joined the group and protested some or all of the plans for the library involvement in the downtown redevelopment plan. The danger in this approach is that the promoters of the plan could "domesticate the dissenters". For example, Don could have become the voice of the dissenters and organize them in a way that could be better managed by the proponents. By making the dissenters a part of the process, they become neutralized. We see this happen when city councils and planning commissions form an advisory panel. The government officials may not have any intention of following the recommendations of the panel, but the members will be occupied. For example, they would find it hard to give open and vocal opposition to the proposal in the form of letters to the editor of the local newspaper.

In the second more severe type of protest while retaining his job, Don could have organized a protest group outside of the downtown planning process. Don could have used principals of good library management as the basis for his opposition and more formally

communicate his position to the townsfolk. If his conviction that the plan runs contrary to the way libraries should be run, he would be viewed as the champion of the library. Many people would support him simply because of the natural human tendency to oppose change no matter what the merits may be.

The third escalation in opposition to the plan, Don could find ways to effectively block the plan on some other basis, such as code violations or security concerns. He could cite fire codes and occupancy/use codes. Health or fire codes could easily be used as obstacles to changes to the library. Library security would also be an issue. Would people passing through casually submit to a bag search? Additional security cameras, magnetic detectors could be added to the costs of renovation. Adding restroom capacity to an old facility is very expensive. Additional maintenance and cleaning expenses would be necessary. An upgrade to the air-conditioning system is another possible obstacle. The obstacles could be endless if Don had the right people on his team.

Finally the fourth type of opposition would involve covert operations. While this option may not be available to Don, it could be justified to uncover some abuses, by some how getting damaging information to the public. Don could join the group with an aim to finding and highlighting some wrong doing or he could get an insider to expose some undesirable fact. The awarding of contracts is an easy target. Even the most careful adherence to procurement policies cannot avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. Of course, Don would not want to lose credibility by employing any questionable or illegal tactics.

In the final analysis, Don was capable in terms of education and commitment to his profession to deal with the issues presented in this case study. His commitment to the community and the role that a library plays was less important as evidenced by his

unwillingness to work with the community leaders on the downtown plan. Perhaps his resignation was tendered too early and he could have slowed the progress of the library involvement and influenced its direction if he had stayed on a bit longer. We can make inferences concerning Don's temperament and that he may have lacked strength of personality to deal with the seasoned community leaders. The community leaders can just as well been at fault in realizing that a more considered, soft-sell approach would have been appropriate in dealing with the library administrator.

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