Political Astuteness: Bridging the Gap Between Politics and Professionalism

John Nalbandian

ICMA Conference Presenter
Objectives

• Describe gap between political acceptability and administrative sustainability

• Discuss politics as choices among conflicting values

• Compare political and administrative values and perspectives

• Identify translating and aligning roles for chief administrative officers and upper level staff
Gap between Professional and Political Learning*

Staff → Admin Sustainability

Potential for Misunderstanding

Elected → Political acceptability

Hi

Low

Then ← Now

Time

*Credit to John Arnold

John Nalbandian
The University of Kansas
Values

• RESPONSIVENESS =
  - Representation/Participation +
  - Efficiency/Professionalism +
  - Social Equity +
  - Individual Rights
Efficacy and Politics

- High Efficacy
  - Representation
  - Efficiency
  - Social Equity
  - Individual Rights

- Low Efficacy
### Characteristics of Politics and Administration

**Political acceptability** ←→ **Administrative sustainability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
<td>Game/allocation of values</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Players</strong></td>
<td>Representatives</td>
<td>Experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Conversation** | “What do you hear?”  
  - Passion  
  - Dreams  
  - Stories | “What do you know?”  
  - Data  
  - Plans  
  - Reports |
| **Pieces**      | Intangible:  
  Interests and symbols | Tangible:  
  Information; money, people, equipment |
| **Currency**    | Power (stories) | Knowledge (deeds) |
| **Dynamics**    | Conflict, compromise, change | Predictability, cooperation, continuity |
Facilitating Roles

• **Translate** the logic of politics and administration

• **Bridge** the gap between what is politically acceptable and administratively sustainable

• **Align**
  - Staff priorities with governing body goals
  - Governing body and staff expectations
Summary

- Bridging the gap is essential
- Role of governing body is community building—”Honor the past, capture the present, shape the future”
- Good politics is about values not right answers—stories matter
- Value conflicts require compromise and negotiation if “cups” matter
- Do not ignore any value over a period of time
- Democratic process is “messy”
- Politics/administration=ways of thinking
- Role of translator/bridge builder is critical
- Aligning governing body/staff expectations is crucial
Questions/Comments?

Additional Information...
ICMA 100th ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Charlotte Mecklenburg County
SEPTEMBER 14-17 2014