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COVER STORY

Transcending the Community: Local Leadership in a World of Shared Power

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For whom do local government leaders work?

Not long ago, this question would have seemed irrelevant because the answer was obvious: they work for the people who elect or appoint them, and of course they work for the people who pay them. This answer is no longer obvious. The purpose of this article is to defend the claim that future effectiveness in local government leadership will be based on finding new and different answers to the "for whom do we work" question.

In the traditions of both political science and public administration, the logic of government leadership, local and otherwise, depends on two fundamental concepts of democratic government: jurisdiction and the rule of law. Both concepts are alive and well and still form the basis of our governmental institutions.

But the political, economic, social, and communication characteristics of modern life have changed greatly, and these changes challenge the logic of jurisdiction and the effectiveness of the rule of law. These challenges in turn erode the conceptual foundations of traditional public administration and local leadership and raise serious questions about their future.

Jurisdiction

First of all, jurisdiction is a place, a rooted territory defined by precise frontiers, boundaries that describe the spaces within and without. Jurisdiction defines itself by what it is not: it is not a social group, a religious group, a racial group, or a language (Guehenno 1995, 4). Jurisdiction is all about space and the unique history of those who live in that space.

Jurisdictions reflect the special circumstances that prevailed at the time when they were established and when the boundaries of their territory were determined. As circumstances have changed, most jurisdictional boundaries have stayed the same. Over time, however, long-established boundaries have become less and less relevant to the needs of those living within them.

How do you define and understand public management when sovereignty and jurisdiction are in considerable doubt?

Spatially, jurisdictions may be thought of horizontally, as in a grouping of nations like Canada, the United States, and Mexico; and vertically, as in a grouping of levels of government: the United States, the state of California, Los Angeles County, and the city of Santa Monica. In a literal sense, these spatially expressed jurisdictions are both the places where we work and the governments that employ us.

The territory or space of the jurisdiction is of dwindling importance now that agriculture and industry represent a decreasing portion of economic activity. Raw materials, too, are a gradually declining aspect of production. Agriculture, manufacturing, and the extraction of raw materials all depend heavily on space and a lot of it. And they depend heavily on large populations of locally established and continually residing people.

The value of space is diminishing, replaced by the rising value of competent people. The value of space for production is declining, while the value of space for occupation, and particularly space with great natural beauty or space in interesting and vibrant cities, is climbing (Florida 2004).

A piece of land is now worth less for what it can produce than for the people who can settle on it or visit it; the inhabitants of the land are now its resources, and the more rare the resources the more valuable. For an increasing percentage of people, the requirements of work no longer determine where they choose to live.

Wealth is less and less tangible and increasingly abstract and immaterial. To this extent, the traditional links between wealth and territory are rapidly declining in importance. Value is changing from agriculture, industry, extraction, and exploitation and moving toward connecting: connecting those who know with those who need to know, those selling with those buying, entertainers with those wishing to be entertained, authors with readers, and so forth. Being plugged into the right networks and knowing how to be effective in these networks is value. In the modern world of telecommunications, networks transcend territory and space, transcend jurisdiction and sovereignty, and, far too often, transcend the rule of law.

There is now a widely acknowledged mismatch between jurisdictional boundaries and jurisdictional problems. At the level of the nation-state, author Daniel Bell describes it this way: "(T)he nation is becoming too small for the big problems of life, and too big for the small problems of life. It is too small for the big problems because there are no effective international mechanisms to deal with such things as capital flows, commodity imbalances, the loss of jobs, and the several demographics tidal waves that will be developing in the next 20 years. It is too big for the small problems because the flow of power to a

national political center means that the center becomes increasingly unresponsive to the variety and diversity of local needs. In short, there is a mismatch of scale" (1993, 12).

In American metropolitan areas, high levels of suburbanization and jurisdictional fragmentation have deeply eroded the capacity of metropolitan areas to deal with their problems. Rural county lines drawn in the horse-and-buggy era now make little sense. The problems faced by the least advantaged of us-crime, drugs, little or no public transportation, chronic underemployment, inadequate affordable housing, and air and water pollution-bypass arbitrarily drawn jurisdictional boundaries and tend not to stay put.

The match between jurisdictions and the problems faced by those who live in them is getting weaker and weaker. But, short of war and scandal, it is politically extremely difficult to change jurisdictional boundaries.

Power, Authority, and Sovereignty

Jurisdiction lacks meaning without power and authority. In democratic governmental traditions, power and authority are conveyed through a generalized popular commitment to preestablished constitutions, to electoral representation, to legislatively passed law, and to the executive execution of the law.

The sovereignty of jurisdictions, and particularly of nation-states, is evaporating out at the top, leaking out at the sides, and seeping out at the bottom. Threats to our national security are as likely to come from stateless terrorist groups as from other countries.

Jurisdictions claim sovereignty over territory and convey citizenship on those living within their boundaries. Sovereignty, in turn, is understood to be "supreme authority within a territory," an authority based on "some mutually acknowledged source of legitimacy-natural law, divine mandate, hereditary law, a constitution, even international law" (Philpott 2001).

Nation-states are unitary, which is to say that they presume to contain all power and sovereignty over their territory and people and particularly over any subgovernments. In fact, however, all nation-states are either regionally decentralized or federated, with multiple subgovernments claiming territorial jurisdiction and exercising either formal or delegated power in a wide, downward diffusion of sovereignty.

Under these arrangements, each of us is a national citizen as well as a state, county, city, and school-district resident. Therefore, we are subject to multiple layers of sovereign claims, constitutions, laws, regulations, and taxes. In their professional lives, local government leaders execute the work of territorially based subgovernments: cities, counties, and special districts, each with their

own share of sovereignty, their charter and ordinances, and their taxes.

In classic public administration, the jurisdiction is our employer, as managers, and the house in which we work. We believe that we work in the people's house and that our role in this house is to serve them, but the rapidly changing characteristics of jurisdiction are forever altering the people's "houses" and fundamentally challenging the simple claim that we work for those who pay us.

In a world in which wealth is less tangible and more abstract, how shall it be taxed? In modern democracies, all forms of taxation have territorial bases: property, income, and transactions. People and corporations are increasingly mobile-moving to avoid taxes if they are rich, to find work if they are poor, or to sell their work at the highest price if they have particular skills. What will it come to mean to state and local governments as increasing percentages of sales are transacted over the Internet and as increasing numbers of residents earn their incomes elsewhere?

The most important feature of contemporary public administration is the declining relationship between jurisdiction and public management. Jurisdictions of all types-nation-states, states, provinces, cities, counties, and special districts-are losing their borders (Strange 1996). Economic activity, which was once at least somewhat local, in the sense of being contained within the borders of a jurisdiction, is increasingly multijurisdictional or nonjurisdictional. Investments, production, and consumption are seldom geographically contained, and this trend is destined to strengthen.

The new global economy has been described as "the end of geography." The revolution in telecommunications has forever altered the meaning of physical space and thereby forever altered the importance of borders and boundaries, primary elements of the idea of jurisdiction. These changes in economics and telecommunications have also changed social relationships, particularly among the well-educated, the economically well off, and the people who hold leading political roles. Within these groups, even place of residence and citizenship are being affected. These people are linked less and less to a single specific locale or jurisdiction and identify themselves more and more as bicoastal, transnational, or global.

The sovereignty of jurisdictions, and particularly of nation-states, is evaporating out at the top, leaking out at the sides, and seeping out at the bottom. Threats to our national security are as likely to come from stateless terrorist groups as from other countries. Changes in European and Asian economics are as likely to influence our economy as vice versa. Los Angeles may be more influenced by Tokyo or Beijing than even by Sacramento or Washington, D.C. The European Union can nix major corporate mergers, even the mergers of American corporations.

The global economy challenges jurisdictionally based systems of taxation, particularly as more transactions are made over the Internet. And because of

the Internet, American laws against, for example, child pornography, illegal drug sales, and gambling are extremely difficult to enforce. The mobility of capital is so great that nation-states, states, and cities now constitute markets in which firms shop for low wages, favorable tariffs, tax breaks, and lax regulation.

With the freedom of human mobility, both figuratively and literally, people with resources can find places favorable to their interests, like homes abroad, offshore tax shelters, and so on. The capacity of the state to deal with complex social and economic issues has eroded significantly. Crime, for instance, often has its origins in other jurisdictions than the ones where it is reported and prosecuted. Acid rain and water pollution start in one set of localities and profoundly affect many others. Oceans, seas, and rivers are polluted by sewage and fertilizer runoff from distant places.

Immigrants and a growing number of refugees move across porous borders. Infectious diseases pay no attention to jurisdictions. As borders and the sovereignty of jurisdictions decline in importance, there is a corresponding decline in the capacity of local governments to significantly contain many public policy problems and, therefore, in their ability to manage these matters.

How do you define and understand public management and local leadership when the city, the state, and the nation-state are less relevant? How do you define and understand public management when sovereignty and jurisdiction are in considerable doubt?

One defining principle of democratic theory is a congruent or symmetrical relationship between the governed and those who govern. It is difficult to conceptualize representative democracy when many important decisions that affect the lives of the represented are often not controlled or even influenced by those who represent them. How do we define and understand public management when it is not always entirely clear for whom we work?

For Whom Do Local Leaders Work?

Returning to the question asked in the beginning of this article: "For whom do we work? The literal answer to the question appears simple, namely, that we work for our jurisdictions. But this is a simplistic, impoverished, and misleading answer, one not worthy of serious local government professionals.

To try to answer the question more fully and with greater validity, we need to make a conceptual jailbreak, to slip the bonds of our localities and think as freely as possible about how we really do our work and for whom we presume to do that work.

Here are the five factual and conceptual building blocks of a comprehensive and useful answer to our topic question. After a brief description of each of the blocks, we will attempt to arrange them into the answer we are looking for.

The first building block is high jurisdictional fragmentation; there are literally

thousands of cities, counties, school districts, and authorities. Despite attempts to eliminate and consolidate jurisdictions, their numbers increase annually, particularly those of authorities and districts (Judd 2004; Burns 1994).

High jurisdictional fragmentation is accompanied by a wide dispersion of authority, power, and sovereignty; to use the fancy academic word, we live in a polycentric world (Ostrom 1987). Many, indeed most, of the newly established single-purpose authorities and districts are formed by local jurisdictions, as in the case of economic development authorities, bonding authorities, and so on.

On the one hand, growing jurisdictional fragmentation can aggravate the mismatch between problems and the capacity of discrete units of local government to deal with those problems. On the other hand, the creation of new local and regional authorities is good evidence of organizational creativity in dealing with problems that don't fit jurisdictional boundaries.

The second building block is the fact that an increasing number of quasi-governmental and nongovernmental organizations, both nonprofit and corporate, are engaged in public and governmental activities as jurisdictional partners or by contract with jurisdictions (Koppell 2003). Extending the reach of a local government via partnerships and through contracting, so as to achieve public outcomes without directly increasing the number of public employees, is the order of the day.

Contract-based partnerships—involving exporting the work of government to third parties—are so popular and have grown in number to such an extent that one prescient analyst asks, "What is the true size of government?" (Light 1999) The answer, of course, is that the number of direct civil-service employees of a jurisdiction is no longer even a clue as to its actual size. Third-party policy implementation is freighted with more and more serious questions of accountability associated with the contrasting values and objectives of third parties when compared with the values and objectives of local governments (Sclar 2000; Handler 1996; Suleiman 2003).

The third building block is both factual and conceptual: local jurisdictions and their partners are nested or embedded in highly complex, vertical and horizontal contexts of influence and interdependency. Localities are understood to be subgovernments in the hierarchy of federalism, or, as the cynics put it, cities and counties are the intergovernmental-relations bottom-feeders. Cities are nested side by side with other localities but, also with other localities, are now layered over by an increasing number of single-purpose regional governments (Koppell 2003). The nested or embedded quality of localities situates them in arrangements of dependency-financial dependency, legal dependency, and dependency for program effectiveness-the opposites of jurisdictional autonomy (Sharp 1995).

The fourth building block is a recognition of the jurisdictional limitations of politics and of the logic of local democratic self-government. The primary

instruments of local politics-standing for office, campaigns, holding office, ordinance and budget making, oversight of professional administration-are deeply jurisdictional. Regional and metropolitan forms of governance are comparatively politically weak, held together primarily by administrative professionals (Downs 1994; Stephens and Wikstrom 2000; Miller 2002).

At best, regional and metropolitan authorities or polities are governed by officials who are once removed from direct local politics and who are serving by appointment on a secondary basis, like the mayor of a city serving a term on the board of the local council of governments. Regional and metropolitan authorities are, therefore, secondary forms of democracy that are generally less effective politically and only effective insofar as they have good professional administration (Swope 2004).

The fifth and final building block is conceptual: an urgent need to reconsider what is understood to be public. For a century, those who have studied and practiced local government administration have assumed that government was the same thing as public and that governments comprised all of the essential elements of public life. We now know that local government is far less than the local public sector, a sector that includes voluntary associations, community groups, business and interest groups, and even the media.

It is now generally understood that the local public sector properly includes organizations and institutions that may not be governmental but have such a profound and direct effect on the local collective well-being that they are best understood and defined as public. Perhaps the best example would be local gas, electric, and communications utilities.

These five building blocks of high jurisdictional fragmentation, increasing third-party jurisdictional partnerships, the nested characteristics of local jurisdictions, the weakness of regional politics, and a broadened definition of what is included in the local public sector combine to form the foundations of a key answer to the "for whom do we work" question. When combined, the building blocks lead us to this conclusion: leadership in local government, both elected and appointed, depends for its effectiveness upon an understanding of shared-power and on a capacity to lead in a shared-power world (Kettl 1993).

Shared Power and Governance

In the world of shared power, "the organizations that get things done will no longer be hierarchical pyramids with most of the real control at the top. They will be systems-interlaced webs of tension in which control is loose, power diffuse, and centers of decision plural" (Cleveland 1972). Decision making in the shared-power context in which local governments and their leaders are nested is an increasingly intricate process of multilateral brokerage, both inside and outside the locality.

Because cities and counties share their power in both horizontal and vertical directions, the ways in which they are led will be more collegial, consensual,

and consultative. The greater the problem the local government faces, the more the power to deal with that problem has been diffused and the larger the number of persons who can exercise it-if they work at it (Cleveland 1972).

The word governance has become the primary descriptor of modern multijurisdictional responses to collective challenges, as well as the word most often used to describe what local leaders do when they work together or share the power to get things done. Governance is not the same thing as government. Although they are working from the vantage points of particular jurisdictions, leaders practicing this kind of governance see the big social, economic, and political context in which they are embedded, and thus they come to understand a fundamental paradox.

To serve a city well, its leaders must transcend the city. Governance, as a logic of power sharing designed to collectively achieve shared interests and agreed-upon values, is essential to furthering the interests of the city. To be effective, local leaders must be in the county, of the county, yet transcend the county, rise above it, go beyond its limits (Peterson 1981).

There was a time not that long ago when localities were mostly insulated from world affairs. No longer. "There is little, maybe nothing, that is global that does not now have some sort of local manifestation. And each local manifestation changes the global context. Place-centeredness is the amalgam of global change and local identity. . . . Local perceptions are shaped by global influences, the combinations of which produce local actions. These in turn are fueled by local aspirations, many of which are the product of global images and expectations" (O'Riordan and Church 2000, 3).

In 2003, author James Rosenau described a world of distant proximities in which all significant distant events and issues have a local or proximate manifestation, and significant local events and issues influence other proximities.

In two recent and popular treatments of distant proximities, Benjamin R. Barber's Jihad vs. McWorld (2001) and Thomas Friedman's The Lexus and the Olive Tree, the point is the interactions between local and regional cultures (particularly Islamic cultures) and worldwide forces (particularly American popular culture and western capitalism).

Contemporary terrorism is, for example, not primarily state-sponsored but regionally organized and, when carried out, always local. It is the local authorities, and particularly the professional first responders, who deal with terrorism. Local government professionals deal with all local manifestations of regional and global forces. It is therefore critically important that there be informed and effective local professionals, especially ones who understand distant proximities and know how to engage in effective governance.

"(A)s consensuses form, widen, and compete, so will expansion occur in the realm of governance. Increasingly, it seems clear, multilevel governance will be

the dominant mode through which NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), communities, governments, regions, and the world attempt to exert a modicum of control over their affairs. . . (D)istant circumstances will become ever more proximate. . . (F)ragmentation will be with us for a long time, and surely many of its tensions will intensify. But inclinations to incorporate new, horizontal forms of authority into the panoply of governance mechanism[s] are not lacking, and that is not a trivial conclusion" (Rosenau 2003, 400-401). These mechanisms will primarily be built and operated by professional public executives, many of them at the local level.

It is fair to ask what ought to be the proper role of local appointed executives-local government managers and administrators, school superintendents, and authority executives-in this new governance. After all, local jurisdictions are little democracies, and local appointed executives, however expert, do not in a formal sense represent the people. Politics, as we have learned, is in almost all cases contained within the boundaries of jurisdictions, and local elected officials tend therefore to have a rather limited interest in matters of jurisdictional fragmentation and in the institutional complexities in which localities are nested.

For this reason, the practice of interjurisdictional governance and the arrangements for power sharing are mostly left to professional administrators, which brings us to a second paradox: many critical elements of local democratic governance depend for their effectiveness on nonelected professional administrators.

For Whom Do Local Officials Work? The Professional Answer

We return now to where we began. If, in our conduct of governance and power sharing, local officials are practicing a form of applied democracy, for whom do we work? The answer is found in the literature on the various local government professions: local government management, law enforcement, fire protection, public works, education, social services, and so on. In the case of writings on city and county managers and administrators, the way we as professionals are described as treating our democratic obligations is highly instructive.

The best of this literature points out that local government professionals share policy-making responsibilities with elected officials and have formal accountability for responsiveness to community values, including efficiency, representation, individual rights, and social equity. As author John Nalbandian wrote in 1991, there is a "growing acceptance that the city is a political and social as well as an economic unit, and managers cannot deal with the one without attending to the other.

"As important as jobs and a growing tax base are for a community, its viability depends as well on its capacity to make collective decisions in a context of growing diversity and interests. In this vein, the tolerance, respect, and truthfulness that characterize relations among citizens are precious virtues.

Government nurtures these virtues as it encourages reflective citizenship-a thoughtful understanding of the citizen's expectations and obligations to the community. It is commonly understood that reflective citizenship cannot be taught; it must be learned by doing. Thus, the process of governance is often government's most important product."

Nalbandian, in these few words, also written in 1991, eloquently answers the "for whom do we work" question: "In short, it is the values and the practices of managers that increasingly will define professionalism in local government, not where city managers work or who hires and fires them. Successful professional managers are and will continue to be those who are able to identify, understand, and work with the values of their community."

Local leaders, both elected and appointed, work for the whole people, for the community near at hand as well as for communities farther away. The best local leaders have conceptions of the greater good or of the public interest that guide and motivate them. This involves a form of morality and a form of faith.

According to Harlan Cleveland, the challenges of morality associated with the conduct of multijurisdictional governance are met when "public ethics are in the hearts and minds of individual public executives, and the ultimate court of appeals from their judgments is some surrogate of the people-in-general" (1972, 117).

Note that Cleveland does not argue that accountability is ultimately to the elected officials of one's jurisdiction. His idea of public responsibility is much bigger than that. To Cleveland, in 1972, the moral responsibilities of public executives included basic consideration of four fundamental principles: "a sense of welfare, a sense of equity, a sense of achievement, and a sense of participating."

As a form of faith, governance as practiced by local professionals is guided more by instincts of appropriateness, doing what is understood to be right, than by the logic of consequences. Local government professionals cannot know whether the results of governance will be favorable to the whole people and will accomplish greater good. But they can and must have faith that to attempt to achieve such results is the ultimate expression of trust in the democratic spirit (March and Olsen 1995).

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