Editorial

A Dialogue On Leadership & Public Service

One of the defining moments in a society’s history is when it comes to terms with the issue of “why and how we govern”. In most countries, such defining moments are immortalized in historical documents, national holidays, artistic renderings, symbols of nationhood, and codes of law. There are no right or wrong answers to the question of “why and how we govern”. That is because the “correct” answer in each case is culturally dependent. If we define culture as “the sum of the history, folklore, and values that, taken together, make up the unique identity of a society at a given point in time” (DeMarco, 2003), we can begin to appreciate the complexity of answering such a simple question. The values describe what a society stands for, while the folklore looks at the symbols and stories that best embody those values. The history is the kaleidoscope of people, events, and institutions that help frame the culture. With all of this as living subtext in the great debate around “why and how we govern”, participants in the great drama of nation building debate issues of governance structure: federation...confederation...monarchy...republic...parliament...chambers of government...and the all important “who has the right to participate in decision making?”. Ultimately, the debate focuses on the culturally dependent governing principle: who, how, and why we serve. This is where issues of “governing and the governed” reside. The “debate” always takes place, but sometimes it is not as explicit as it needs to be!

As challenges to the governing construct emerge, societies revisit their governing principles. History is replete with examples of such challenges: the Anarchist Movements in Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries...the post WWI Red Scares...post WWII Cold War...the post WWII end of Colonialism...civil disobedience and Civil Rights movement in the U.S. in the 1960’s and 1970’s...the 1960-1970 FLQ challenge to Canadian sovereignty...the Basque Separatist movement in Spain...the Irish Nationalist Movement...the Sinn Fein—Ulster Unionist confrontations in Northern Ireland...China’s “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”...and, of course, September 11th (2001) to name just a few examples. In each case, societies looked at “who, how, and why we serve”. In each case, the answers to the seminal question of “who, how and why we serve” led to structural reforms.

Robert Harris's painting depicting the 1867 Meeting of the Delegates of British North America, also known as The Fathers of (Canadian) Confederation
These reforms were usually led by leaders who may not always have been right, but were always single-minded of purpose. They acted in service of the values they believed were core to their respective cultures.

The three articles presented in this issue of the *CSL Leadership Review* are by leadership scholars whose knowledge of the public service is significant and personal. We start off with an article by Stephen Brookes, a scholar and distinguished thirty-year veteran of policing and government service in the U.K.. He achieved the rank of Chief Superintendent and Home Office Director for Government Services—East Midlands. During his time as a Divisional Commander, he was involved in the demonstration project which sought to introduce problem oriented policing which was later adopted as a national style of policing. His article presented in these pages, though innately scholarly, is built on his experiences in public life. A decorated public servant, Dr. Brookes asks a big question: *Are Public Leaders Up to Standard?* He describes how competing needs and expectations of diverse stakeholders in the public sector exacerbate the problem of defining what sound leadership looks like. While not dissimilar to the same challenge in the private sector, the author contends that the private sector is driven by customer-oriented profit in comparison to the public sector, which is very much driven by government-imposed targets. Dr. Brookes argues that, to improve public sector leadership, there must be shared aims and values in order to improve a sense of community well being. The article further suggests that the development of public leadership standards is crucial to this improvement. Such standards should ideally apply across the public sector in order to help the development of a culture of “one-public-service” rather than many public services. The article outlines a model of public leadership standards which has not previously been discussed by either practitioners or the research community and which has potential to offer a benchmark by which public leadership can be measured.

Richard Phidd and O.P. Dwivedi are two of Canada’s most distinguished scholars in the field of public service and administrative reform. Scholars and advisors/consultants to governments on several continents, Doctors Phidd and Dwivedi present a detailed analysis of Prime Ministerial Leadership, the Public Service and Administrative Reform in Canada. They provide an historical and longitudinal framework of public sector leadership. In part 1 of a two part article, the authors describe the history of the public service and administrative reform in Canada. While the role of the respective prime ministers is central to their discussion, they carefully describe legislation and institutional changes which impacted the public service as well. Detail is given concerning the role of the Privy Council, Treasury Board, Civil Service Commission, and other agencies, offices, task forces and commissions. Prime ministerial initiatives are juxtaposed against environmental challenges and government power blocks, suggesting a need to pay greater attention to how public sector organizations are led. The authors go on to describe how contemporary public administration studies have pointed to the complexities involved in public sector organizations. They further suggest that this requires more analysis of what happens within public sector organizations." As if anticipating the work of Tim Mau in this issue of *CSL Leadership Review*, Doctors Phidd and Dwivedi call for greater “study of organizational development and change within the public sector”.

The Phidd & Dwivedi article presented in this issue ends in the context of the 1980’s with the administration of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Part two will cover “Prime Ministerial Leadership, the Public Service and Administrative Reform in Canada: Public Sector Reforms from the 1980’s to 2000 and Beyond”. Part two will appear in the Summer 2007 issue of this review.
Tim Mau, a former Commonwealth Scholar, presents an article on “Public Sector Leadership Development: The Canadian Model Considered”. Akin to Brookes and Phidd & Dwivedi, Dr. Mau attempts to demystify “leadership” by taking a careful look at leadership development within the Canadian public service. The author shows how attention has ostensibly been given to the development of leaders at all levels within the public service. The net result is that the government has been able to design a more integrated approach to learning development for employees across the public sector. All of the programs described in these pages are highly specialized development programs, but the approach to leadership development in the Canadian public service has transitioned into a more broadly based model. After describing this transition in detail, the author ultimately assesses the Canadian government’s progress towards its goal of developing “the best public sector leaders in the world”. He identifies the many successes to date, but ultimately concludes: “given the dearth of effective leaders at the senior levels of the public service, the Canadian government would be better served to focus on rectifying the deficiencies rather than spreading its scarce resources too thinly trying to develop every public servant into leaders, including those who may be more interested in assuming a followership role”.

The three articles presented in these pages are an iterative set. They are useful references for starting national dialogues on “how” and “why” we govern in the 21st Century. Brookes asks a big question and offers a unique framework for assessing leadership in the public sector. Phidd and Dwivedi provide a truly comprehensive review of more than a century of Canadian public service reform and its correlation to prime ministerial leadership. Mau, as if building on the work of the authors that precede him in this issue, describes an historical Canadian model for public sector leadership development. The UK and Canadian perspectives presented in these pages challenge the reader to go beyond the many acronyms and data points to reflect on how and why we govern and who, how, and why we serve. This brings us back to the initial premise that “how” and “why” we govern are culturally dependent variables (see Cox and DeMarco, Leadership Beyond Borders: A Sustainable Values-Based Framework, CSL Leadership Review, Summer 2007). These questions are central issues of government, worthy of serious consideration by government officials, civil servants, citizens, and scholars alike, irrespective of national identity. The Centre for Studies in Leadership at the University of Guelph hopes the present issue enhances this important dialogue!

William DeMarco
- Editor