

Mastering the Art of Public Leadership

The Brookings Institution's Center for Public Policy Education has initiated an innovative training program that may sow the seeds for a change in federal government culture through its first cohort of emerging leaders.

DONALD G. ZAUDERER ■ DIANE M. RIDGWAY

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.

—Marcel Proust

Facing the expected retirement of large numbers of federal executives, many agencies are creating leadership programs in an effort to develop qualified replacements. The retirement problem, however, is confounded by the apparent reality that in the government many supervisors, team leaders, managers, and executives appear to be failing in many dimensions of performance. Results of the US Office of Personnel Management's "2002 Federal Human Capital Survey" are a sobering reflection of how federal employees perceive their superiors:

- 36 percent indicated that leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment;
- 39 percent said that employees have a feeling of personal empowerment and ownership of work processes;
- 49 percent indicated that supervisors/team leaders are receptive to change;
- 43 percent indicated they hold their organization's leaders in high regard;
- 47 percent believe their organization's leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity;
- 44 percent believe complaints, disputes, or grievances are resolved fairly in their work unit; and
- 45 percent believe arbitrary action, personal favoritism, and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.

Quality of Leadership

If the quality of leadership is related to the ability of agencies to accomplish their missions, then these survey re-

sults and their implications should concern us. A more positive scenario would be numbers in the range of 80 percent, resulting in a more satisfied workforce and more effective public policy implementation. The current percentages suggest that developing extraordinary leaders for the federal civil service remains a compelling need.

The Brookings Institution's Center for Public Policy Education is taking on the challenge of developing the next generation of emerging leaders. Mastering the Art of Public Leadership (MAPL) is a leadership training program that was initiated in May 2003 with a cohort group of 15 participants from nine federal agencies. The program was carefully crafted to develop a cadre of reflective leaders who think and act strategically, diagnose problems within their organizations, drive change, and exercise fierce resolve in achieving mandated results.

Professionals in public service are frequently trained in technical fields such as engineering, law, accounting and fi-

Donald G. Zauderer is a senior advisor and director of the *Mastering the Art of Public Leadership Program* at The Brookings Institution. He is also professor emeritus of public administration at American University. **Diane M. Ridgway**, a MAPL student, is chief operating officer and vice president of business research and development, FedSource-Seattle, US Department of the Treasury.

The authors wish to thank A. Lee Fritschler, former vice president of the Center for Public Policy Education, for supporting this project from the initial design through implementation. The authors also wish to acknowledge the contributions of the MAPL students, particularly Monique K. Monsoura, Dan Upchurch, Jenny S. Kirshlyama, Harry Danforth, and William Watson for their substantive contributions to the final section of the article.

nance, geography, biology, medicine, geography, soil science, and economics. Their strong technical background enables them to exercise judgment in their field of practice. However, this background may be of little use in the domain of leadership and management. Benjamin Disraeli has stated that, "A man always studying one subject will view the general affairs of the world through the colored prism of

The MAPL program is based on our current thinking on how to develop the next generation of public service leaders.

his own atmosphere." The MAPL program seeks to expand the capacity of professionals to supplement their technical education with new knowledge in the domain of leadership and organization studies.

This article describes the MAPL program that is based on our current thinking on how to develop the next generation of public service leaders. The Program Effectiveness Model is the framework for this program and was used to guide the development of the program structure, philosophy of practice, and culture. Finally, interviews with our initial cadre of 15 participants add the insights and reactions of students currently attending the program. In this section, student practitioners convey a sense of challenges they face and how the program provides constructive approaches to change, both personal and organizational.

Assumptions

Cognitive Development

It is important to make explicit the pedagogical assumptions underlying the program. The first assumption is that to develop emerging leaders, the program needs to focus on improving the cognitive, emotional, and action skills of participants. Cognitive development builds a stronger conceptual foundation from which to examine organization culture, challenge assumptions, explore root causes of problems, assess the quality of communication between organizational levels, and evaluate the practical utility of new approaches to taking action. The Columbia disaster is a stark reminder of what can happen when the leadership, organization culture and climate, and management systems conspire to limit authentic dialogue and critical thinking. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration certainly is not unique in needing to strengthen its leadership capacity and revamp its culture, but it stands as perhaps the most recent and stark example of the need for enhanced leadership performance. Executives with minds educated in the realm of leadership and organization studies can more consistently diagnose and improve their organizations and exercise enlightened judgment in the public interest.

Emotional Component

The second assumption is that understanding the emotional component of leadership is essential to becoming a reflective leader. That is, executives who make intelligent use of their own feelings when contemplating decisions enhance their capacity to exercise enlightened judgment. They pay attention to their "gut feelings" when deciding what they need to know and when they are ready to act. They maintain composure under pressure, listen to prophetic voices, and constrain destructively impulsive behaviors that often derail careers and reduce effectiveness.

Practice and Reflection

The third pedagogical assumption relates to the benefits of practice and reflection. When emerging leaders put theory into practice in the form of action learning, they gain a deeper understanding and capacity to learn from experience, consider how they might act differently in the future, and continually refine their leadership skills. The capacity of leaders to be extraordinary, then, is enhanced when they are proficient in applying theory to different circumstances, making intelligent use of their own feelings and emotions, and consciously designing and implementing action, followed by thoughtful reflection of what they have learned about themselves and the dynamics of leadership and change.

Commitment

The final pedagogical assumption is that personal change and development take place only when participants are genuinely committed to the developmental process and willingly commit time and energy to development activities. Specifically, they need to:

- explore ideas with an open mind;
- actively read and reflect on books and articles;
- keep a thinking journal;
- engage in classroom dialogue;
- constrain defensive routines that block learning;
- explore sensitive issues with coaches;
- place themselves in challenging situations; and
- reflect and learn from experience.

The Program Effectiveness Model

The Program Effectiveness Model was developed to serve as a framework for developing the MAPL program. There are three facets to the Program Effectiveness Model. Program Structure (Part A) deals with student and faculty selection criteria and the course curriculum. Philosophy of Practice (Part B) focuses on educational processes that help leaders emerge as reflective practitioners. Building a "Culture of Community" is the focus of Part C. This third section comprises the assumptions; values; and beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that support the learning program. Effective implementation of the entire model is necessary to obtain

maximum educational benefits and create an executive development program where participants evolve as leaders, where the sponsoring organization gains effective leaders, and where citizens ultimately benefit from more effective programs and services.

A: Program Structure

Establishing student selection criteria was extremely important in designing the program framework. The goal was to assemble a cohort group of emerging leaders who have the requisite motives, experience, skills, and personal qualities to evolve into extraordinary leaders. Thus, the genuine commitment of participants was considered a prerequisite for success. More particularly, the candidate screening focused on qualities such as ambition, integrity, collaborative skills, an ethos of service, and a drive to push the boundaries of constructive change in agencies. In addition to filling out a lengthy application that requests information on current and past job responsibilities, educational background, and professional accomplishments, applicants wrote a personal letter.

Equally important to the Program Structure is assembling a group of faculty and guest speakers with distinguished records in research, teaching, and leadership practice. The MAPL faculty, some of whom are Brookings' scholars, must be able to actively engage participants in the learning process. They must exhibit concern for the developmental needs of each participant and possess a passion for developing extraordinary leaders for the public service.

The third aspect of the Program Structure is the curriculum. A 10-course curriculum was selected after conducting focus groups, a literature review, and examining the Office of Personnel Management's Executive Core Qualification requirements. The criterion for including specific course content was answering the following question in the affirmative: Will this material provide information and learning outcomes essential to the development of extraordinary leaders? The 10 courses included in the curriculum include: Strategic Leadership, Democracy, and the Public Service, the Art of Political Leadership, Organization Diagnosis and Change, Human Capital Management, the Emotionally Intelligent Leader, Facilitating High Performing Teams, Communicating for Effective Action, Critical Perspectives for Reflective Practitioners, and the Ethical Public Leader.

B. Philosophy of Practice

In addition to selecting participants, building a talented faculty, and constructing a curriculum, we needed to establish a philosophy of practice that would shape the process of teaching and learning that would help participants evolve as leaders. We started with the end in mind, which is to develop the cognitive, emotional, and action skills of emerging leaders, enabling them to create substantive value for their organizations and the American public.

It is Donald A. Schon who refers to leaders who operate with high professional artistry as "reflective practitioners." In his view, reflective practitioners can frame situations, and understand the relationship between means and methods employed and results achieved. They have the ability to rethink and reshape action while exercising their artistry. They can think beyond conventional wisdom in shaping

The MAPL community, students and faculty, is a society formed from individuals who come together to learn and grow as leaders.

their approach to action. Similarly, Karl E. Weick believes that extraordinary leaders are "sensemakers." They have the ability to comprehend situations by placing data into frameworks, by understanding the meaning of events, and by interacting with others in pursuit of mutual understanding. A leader with an educated mind has a far better chance of discovering the root cause of problems and designing interventions that bring about positive sustainable change.

Developing Reflective Practitioners

To develop reflective practitioners, learning processes were designed that incorporate reading and thinking, journal writing, shared inquiry discussions, active involvement in classroom learning, action learning, and coaching, all against the backdrop of an understanding of current and emerging public policies and the potential impact on implementation efforts. To achieve maximum benefit, the educational producers and customers must enter into a joint responsibility partnership focused on developing reflective practitioners for the public service. The elements of the learning processes are as follows:

- **Reading and Thinking:** What are the important understandings, concepts, theories, or recommendations that warrant deeper consideration? What basic assumptions underlay the author's writing (e.g., human nature, ethical values, or beliefs about the rights of individuals)? Active readers ponder how these ideas may improve their leadership performance and improve agency operations.
- **Journal Writing:** Writing can help one critically question underlying premises, values, and beliefs. As MAPL participants become mindful of their patterns of thought and action, they gain the capacity to make decisions based on reflection and choice rather than impulse, habit, unexamined assumptions, or narrow perceptions of reality. Course interactions provide the stimulus to reflect on how to increase their capacity as leaders. They can explore strengths and vulnerabilities in areas such as coaching, emotional intelligence, communication, facilitation, and change management.

- **Shared Inquiry Discussions:** By posing thought-provoking questions, the facilitator helps participants consider issues from many angles and to grow as reflective practitioners. The assumption underlying the shared inquiry process is that when participants actively and cooperatively engage in dialogue, they are more apt to retain and apply ideas than if they had received them passively.
- **Instructional Methods:** Some executive development programs make primary use of a single instructional method such as case analysis. In MAPL, various instructional methods are utilized such as lecture and discussion, group problem solving, experiential exercises, participant-led facilitation, simulations, skill practice, and case analysis.
- **Action-Learning:** Action-learning is a process where individuals or small groups solve real organizational problems while focusing on what they are learning. This provides MAPL participants the opportunity to put ideas from the program into practice, and to further learn about their strengths and developmental needs.
- **Coaching Program:** Reflective practitioners evolve by testing ideas and behaviors in the context of real agency problems. A coach is available to provide ongoing assistance in the design and implementation of the agency-sponsored action-learning project. The coach also assists participants in setting personal development goals to enhance their leadership capacity.
- **Public Policy Applications:** The Brookings scholars are distinguished thought leaders in their public policy fields. These scholars are used frequently to help participants understand current public policy developments in areas such as homeland security, human capital management, outsourcing, and other areas of concern to public sector leaders.

C. The MAPL Culture

Culture is the third segment of the program effectiveness model. Anthropologists studying culture examine the assumptions, values, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies of a given society. In a sense, the MAPL community, students and faculty, is a society formed from individuals who come together to learn and grow as leaders. What, then, are the defining characteristics of this society?

The MAPL program staff establish an environment that encourages MAPL colleagues to demonstrate interest in each other's lives, listen actively, and learn from each other. MAPL colleagues share common values about how to conduct themselves to strengthen the quality of learning for the entire group. In the MAPL orientation for Class I, participants were given the task of formulating the vision and mission statements and statement of core values that would guide their behavior throughout the 10-month program. The statements they drew up are as follows.

Mission Statement: We seek to be reflective practitioners of leadership. We will grow and learn through:

- critical examination of course materials;
- explorations of shared experiences; and
- leveraging the expertise of MAPL faculty.

We seek to be creative, constructive, and aggressive change agents working to restore personal pride and public trust in government service.

We will ensure:

Safe and Supportive Environment:

- respectful critique of ideas;
- confidentiality (personal and institutional);
- informal dress;
- open climate for candid discussion;
- taking responsibility for the common good; and
- be vulnerable and expose vulnerabilities

Respectful Learning Environment:

- electronics "off" in class;
- don't extend breaks;
- come prepared;
- rotate seating;
- challenge assumptions;
- stimulate participation;
- maintain accountability;
- have fun; and
- build a strong network.

Vision: We will become a community of recognized leaders who effect positive change throughout our career in government service.

These expressions of core values reflect a belief among the group members that these behaviors will strengthen the quality of learning while building a network of close colleagues with a common passion for service in the public interest. Rituals and ceremonies are another means of building the bonds of a learning community. Members of MAPL Class I have agreed to have dinner together on Thursday evenings, to celebrate birthdays, and to hold an "open forum" during lunch to discuss community issues, share news, work out problems, and just catch up with each other. A dinner celebration is being planned to conclude this segment of the group's life.

The Voice of Students

My colleagues and I, reflecting on our initial reason for applying to MAPL, used terms such as: exposure to new ideas, putting learning into action, career development, challenge, opportunity, personal benefit, making a difference, and honing leadership. Implicit in these words was an

interest in being challenged to think beyond our personal goals and to consider how our agencies and the public would benefit from our participation.

This is not a naive cohort. Each of us has a substantial position and has attended management training courses during years of government service. When returning to our agencies, the culture and lack of interest in new ideas or ways of operating often have frustrated us. This is a group painfully aware of the imperfections and limitations of the bureaucratic system in which we operate. Yet, rather than begrudge the bureaucracy or passively accept it, this is a group energized by public service and committed to making our agencies better for ourselves, our colleagues and, most importantly, the public we serve. As we move up to senior leadership, we look forward to exercising discretion in ways that will create a more positive climate for work and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of agency operations.

Most of us, upon entering the MAPL program, were not prepared for an environment in which we were expected to invest heavily in learning and consciously integrate new ideas and approaches in our practice as leaders. We are coming to realize that evolving as a reflective leader does not happen without hard work, including an honest exploration of our own limitations and vulnerabilities. Yet the safe environment of our learning community makes such explo-

ration possible, allowing for deeper learning that has a sustainable impact on our development as leaders.

Being Challenged

Have we been challenged to look at the world of leadership, management, and public service differently? Most definitely! A recent session presented a historical perspective on government and public administration. Like most people inside and outside of government service, we believed that our government is overburdened with rules and regulations, slow to respond, and sometimes inefficient. In this session, we learned that a certain level of inefficiency was purposefully built into the system.

We hope that this article creates further dialogue on how to develop the next generation of leaders for the public service. ■

REFERENCES

1. Schon, Donald A., 1987. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
2. Weick, Karl E., 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
3. Marquardt, Michael J., 1999. *Action Learning*, Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black.

2003 STATE OF TRAINING

Continued from p. 29

Cognitive Processes. We are learning about the critical role of language in learning and how it can be exploited to increase learning. What does it mean to learning that some people can listen in one language and simultaneously interpret in another or even multiple languages? Many areas of cognitive processing point to another decade or more of amazing achievement in understanding learning. Groundbreaking work, happening in dozens of fields, creates an unfortunate paradox. The work is totally inaccessible to learners. It is written for other researchers, and published in expensive, hard-to-get journals. The language of the discipline is used and very few writers are trying to interpret this work at the level of the learners. The ownership of the breakthroughs stays among researchers, teachers, and trainers. Is this the right place for it?

Breakthroughs in Content Delivery

Electronic Delivery. Teaching machines, first developed by Sidney Pressey in 1934, have evolved into significant teaching tools. Modern personal computers can present text, graphics, animation, audio, and video. They can take input from the learner and branch to an appropriate place in the program. They also are used to test what a learner knows and present more information if that is appropriate. The e-

Learning marketplace evolved to a several billion-dollar market built on these simple concepts.

Embedded Training Systems. Training placed into tools, available right at the moment of need, have tremendous potential. They could be available in factory equipment, hospital surgical units, or ambulances. A fully functional embedded system would contain all of the content, performance measurement, and learning management functions integrated into where it will be most useful.

Simulations. An artificial world that can stand on its own or can supplement other training experiences. They provide a problem or a physical challenge that the learner could encounter in the real world. Fortunately, learning with the simulators is a totally safe environment. The better a simulator can recreate the situation faced by the learner, the easier it is to learn. Flight simulators have been around for decades and they provide an experience that is quite similar to flying an airplane.

Summary: What Is the State of Training?

Training and development are at the beginning of a true renaissance. The breakthroughs in training during the last 20 years will transform education, training, and much of the way we do business. All of the organizations have concluded that new technologies and breakthroughs in training are required to do the job ahead. What remains to be seen is whether we can do the hard work ahead of us in time to avoid inevitable chaos and destruction. ■