INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING PUBLIC SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
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Instructor
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office hours: At the Puck Building, Thursday, 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm,
or by appointment

Class meets Tuesday & Thursday 2:00 pm – 3:15 pm
Room: Myers Hall 157

Course Overview:
The goal of this course is to enhance your understanding of management in
government agencies and nonprofit organizations. The course provides you with an
understanding of the tools you need to diagnose and solve organizational problems,
to influence the actions of individuals, teams and organizations, and to lead high
performing, effective organizations. We will examine the key variables in an
organization that must be considered and managed, including power relationships,
culture, communication, leadership and ethics. We will use case studies to enhance
your understanding of the practical realities that drive managerial effectiveness.

Required Course Materials:
Public Administration Concepts and Cases
By Richard J. Stillman II
Wadsworth Cengage Learning

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Expectations:
Read the Cases and Assigned Readings

It is important that you complete the readings for each session in advance of class.
You and your classmates will not benefit as much from the class session and you will
not be able to contribute to the class discussion if you have not read in advance.
Participate in Class Discussions

You should be prepared to share your ideas and to listen to and interpret the issues presented by others. One of the challenges and interesting aspects of management in the public sector is how few issues have right, or wrong answers. Most of the time, there is more than one right answer and often managers are in pursuit of the best answer, amidst a complex and difficult set of facts and unknowns. A case is a problem-solving situation and managerial effectiveness often depends on seeing different solutions.

Adopt an open-minded stance, entertain new ideas from others and consider how your recommendations might change in light of these new insights.

Your class participation is crucial to understanding the complexity of decision-making and the success of the class session. Most participation will be voluntary; however, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved, individuals will occasionally be called upon at my discretion. Also keep in mind that your goal should be to contribute comments of quality rather than mere quantity.

*I cannot help resolve your problems unless you tell me about them.* So please stop by my office during my office hours to discuss any academic troubles. If my hours don’t work for you, we will schedule time that accommodates both our schedules.

Read with an eye toward linking theory and practice

The cases in the textbook and articles on Blackboard provide key ideas and theoretical insights into human behavior and its impact on productivity and effectiveness. To be sure you have grasped the point of each piece, ask yourself:

- What is the author’s main argument?
- What are the key concepts and principles introduced?
- In the context of the case studies, how could I improve the outcome?

Apply theory to practice

The cases provide concrete situations to which you should apply the concepts introduced in the articles. As you read the cases practice diagnosing the nature and causes of organizational performance and thinking through the potential consequences of different action strategies.

Review the Syllabus Addendum on Reading Cases.
Experiential Team Project

At the beginning of the semester, students will be divided into teams of 4 students. Each team will be assigned a field within the world of public service and the teams first assignment will be to choose a government or nonprofit agency the team will focus on for the semester (it may be an organization one or more team members have experience with, but all team members must agree they have an interest in its work). The team will research that organization over the course of the semester, focusing on those aspects of management we cover in class. Your team research will begin on the web, and continue with interview(s) with the organization’s management. The teams will be created by the second week, the teams will choose an organization by the third week and meet with the organization by the time you return from Spring Break. A minimum of three times during the semester each individual team member will write a one-page paper addressing an issue I assign from the syllabus, presenting how your organization has confronted a similar issue.

In addition, there will be a team project. The team will choose a topic covered in the syllabus (approved by me) that has presented a particular challenge for your organization. That challenge will have been uncovered in the team’s research, and hopefully confirmed and elucidated by meeting with the organization. It will be particularly rewarding if the challenge chosen is one the organization is willing to freely discuss with you. The team will produce a written report and make a presentation to class and together that will constitute the Final Exam.

The specifics and organization of the Final Report are left to your discretion; however, it should contain the following:

- a short description of the problem under study
- an overview of the present situation in regard to the problem
- the resources and constraints (for example, social, political, or economic) in dealing with the problem
- an outline of the alternative courses of recommended action to solve the problem
- an evaluation of each alternative
- the team’s specific recommendation for dealing with the problem at hand and why it is the best available option (political, budget etc)
- a dissenting team opinion, if necessary

The oral reports will be presented during the last two classes of the semester and each team’s report should be limited to 20 minutes and will be open to questions. Visual aids may be used in the oral presentation. The written report (limited to 20 pages) should reflect team effort and be footnoted where appropriate.
You will be given some class time for team organization, workload distribution and research. Any problems that arise within the teams must be brought to my attention immediately.

Late assignments will be accepted but points will be deducted. All written assignments are to be typed, with numbered pages, double-spaced in 12-point font. Email submission encouraged.

**Blackboard and email**

- You must have access to the Blackboard site at [http://classes.nyu.edu/](http://classes.nyu.edu/). Your NYU account must be activated to access Blackboard. If you have not activated your NYU net account or have forgotten your password, you can activate it or change your password at [http://start.nyu.edu](http://start.nyu.edu).

- Some class announcements will also be distributed via e-mail. Thus, it is important that you actively use your NYU e-mail account, or have appropriate forwarding set up on NYUHome [https://home.nyu.edu/](https://home.nyu.edu/).

- You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view and print the materials on Blackboard. If you do not already have this (free) software installed on your computer, go to [http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html) and follow the download instructions.

_Phone should be turned off during class._

**Grading**

- 30% Class Participation
- 25% Experiential Project / Teamwork & Written Assignments
- 20% Midterm Exam
- 25% Final Exam

**Statement of Academic Integrity**

As members of the NYU community, we are all expected to adhere to high standards of intellectual and academic integrity. You can view our Academic Code at the following

URL: [http://wagner.nyu.edu/current/policies](http://wagner.nyu.edu/current/policies)
COURSE OUTLINE AND SESSION SCHEDULE

ASSIGNED READINGS SHOULD ALL BE DONE BEFORE CLASS. The assigned readings are in the textbook or found on Blackboard (BB). In the textbook, always read the introductions to articles and cases.

January 25  Introduction to Course / Discuss Reading Case Studies Effectively

January 27  The Scope and Purpose of Public Administration

Read: 1) Stillman, R.J.  *The Study of Public Administration in the United States*, pages 1-6 and 16-30

2) Case Study: Martin, J.B.  *The Blast in Centralia #5*

February 1  The Scope and Purpose of Public Administration

Read: Wilson, Woodrow, *The Study of Administration*

Teams will be created.

February 3  The Scope and Purpose of Public Administration

Teams will be given class time to begin work

February 8  The Ecology of Public Administration

Read: Gaus, J. *The Ecology of Public Administration* pages 78-85

February 10  The Ecology of Public Administration

Read: Case study: Cooper, T. & Breyer, T., *William Robertson: Exemplar of Politics and Public Management*

Teams will announce their choice of organization

February 15  The Political Environment of Public Administration

Read: Case Study: Casamayou, M.H.  *The Columbia Accident*

February 17  The Political Environment of Public Administration

Read: Pfeffer, J. *Understanding Power in Organizations* (BB)
February 22  Decision Making / Incremental Choice
   Read: Course Text pages 212-215
   Case Study: Grunwald, M. & Glasser, S. How a City Slowly Drowned

February 24  Decision Making / Incremental Choice
   Read: Lindbloom, C. The Science of “Muddling Through”

March 1  The Criticality of Good Communication
   Read: Garnett, J.L. Administrative Communication, pages 239-257 (Course Text)
   Tannen, D. The Power of Talk (BB)
   Cartwright, T. & Baldwin, D. Seeing Your Way: Why Leaders Must Communicate Their Vision (BB)

March 3  The Criticality of Good Communication
   Read: Case Study: Rosengrant, S. The Shootings at Columbine High School: The Law Enforcement Response

March 8  Budgeting As Political Choice
   Read: Rubin, I. The Politics Of Public Budgets
   Case Study: Taubman, P. Death of a Spy Satellite Program

March 10  Midterm Exam

March 15, 17  Spring Break

March 22 & 24  Leadership
   Read: DuBrin, A, Essentials of Management, Ch 10
   Surowiecki, J., Status Quo Anxiety (BB)
   Kotter, J.P., Leading Change (BB)
   Teams will report on their organization meeting(s)

March 29  Personnel and A Public Service Culture
   Read: Case Study: Sontag, D. Who Brought Bernadine Healy Down?
Wise, L. *The Public Service Culture*

**March 31 & April 5  Managerial Roles and Skills**


Pfeffer, J., *Putting People First* (BB)

**April 7 & 12  Strategic Planning in Nonprofit Organizations**

Read: Phills, J.A. Introduction: *The Role of Mission and Strategy in Enhancing the Performance of Nonprofit Organizations* (All 3 on BB)

Bryson, J.M. *A Strategic Planning Process for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*

Bryson, J.M. *The Strategy Change Cycle: An Effective Strategic Planning Approach for Nonprofit Organizations*

**April 14 & 19  Organizational Structure and Culture**

Read: DuBrin, A. *Essentials of Management*, Ch 8 (BB)


**April 21  Executing on the Plan**

Read: Bradach, J.L., Tierney, T.J., Stone, N., *Delivering on the Promise of Nonprofits* (BB)

OPTIONAL: LIGHT, P.C. *The Spiral of Sustainable Excellence* (BB)

**April 26  Ethics and Public Administration**


**April 28  The Politics of Doing Good**

Read: 1) Nye, J.S., *New Models of Public Leadership* (BB)


### May 3
Final Presentations

Final Team Written Reports are due

### May 5
Final Presentations

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**Appendix**

**Overview of Case Analysis**

Many students find case analysis to be difficult due to the relative lack of structure of most management problems. No correctly answered list of questions or mechanical process will lead to the “right” answer. When analyzing a case, remember that there are many possible approaches and solutions. The goal is not to figure out “the answer” but to sharpen your analytic, problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills. The following steps outline the basic approach that you should follow when analyzing a case, whether for class discussion or in preparation for a written analysis.

First, read the assigned reading material and review the relevant documents if any have been posted. The material in the reading and accompanying documents will likely play some role in your analysis of the case. Remember that case analysis in this course is cumulative. Thus material from earlier classes may be relevant and should be applied even if it means using concepts that were not discussed for several weeks.

Second, read the case and the assignment questions in the text. As you read, take notes to keep track of the players, the important issues the case may raise and the text material that seems to apply. The questions provided should be considered a guide to issues that you must consider (but you will need to go beyond merely answering the questions).

Third, analyze the case. You should be able to identify outcomes in the case and/or issues that the organization faces. These outcomes may be bad (e.g., shrinking market share, hostile employees, conflict among departments, inability to control operations), or they may be good. There may be numerous problems and issues. The goal of analysis is to explain the underlying mechanisms that are producing the outcomes or problems that you see in the situation. This process will require you to distinguish between symptoms and causal mechanisms. Consider the following example: You go to the doctor with the “problem” of a cough or a fever. It may be easy for the physician to treat the cough or fever with a number of medicines much
like we could treat worker dissatisfaction by paying higher wages. However, it is important for the physician to determine the causes of the problem. If the cause of the cough is tuberculosis then only treating the cough is apt to lead to serious long-run consequences because the underlying disease process will still be at work. Clearly the cough is just a symptom of a deeper underlying problem, the disease of tuberculosis. Good analysis cleverly weaves symptoms into a causal map that gets to the underlying root of the situation. What I look for in the case analysis is the cogency of your explanation of the process leading to the potential causal mechanisms. At the outset you are likely to struggle with this. It is a difficult and time-consuming process to develop clinical skills.

Take the situation for what it is rather than approaching it with a point of view. Be alert for the danger that some information in some cases is coming from biased participants and therefore must be taken with a grain of salt.

A characteristic of cases (and management!) is that you never have all the information that you want and there is often considerable information that is irrelevant, trivial or even obfuscating. The absence of essential information may force you to make one or more assumptions. Assumptions should always be clearly labeled and explicitly stated as such, they must be necessary and they must be realistic.

If the assignment is a written analysis, do not describe events. This is merely a waste of space. Assume that I have read the case and that I am aware of all the facts. Rather, you should use material in the case to support your analysis or to provide examples to back up your arguments. Remember, your objective is to explain, not describe or report.

Finally, if you are working on a written analysis, make sure that your paper is well written, clearly organized, and has a logical flow. It usually helps to provide a brief summary statement and “roadmap” at the beginning of the analysis to orient and guide the reader. Also make sure that any recommendations you provide follow directly from your analysis of the problem, and that your overall conclusions are consistent with your analysis.

PARTICIPATING IN CASE DISCUSSIONS

1) Keep in mind that there is usually more than one right answer. A case is a problem-solving situation, and managerial effectiveness often depends upon seeing different solutions.

2) Offer your ideas, substantiating them with facts from the case and course material.
3) Adopt an open-minded stance, entertain new ideas from others and consider how your recommendations might change in light of these new insights.

4) Listen to your classmates and build on what they have to say. Resist the impulse to focus so strongly on what you want to say next that you lose track of where the discussion has moved.