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Academic–
Practitioner
Exchange:
The Guerrilla
Bureaucrat

Guerrilla Employees: Should Managers Nurture, Tolerate, or Terminate Them?

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"Guerrilla government" is Rosemary O'Leary's term for the actions of career public servants who work against the wishes—either implicitly or explicitly communicated—of their superiors. This form of dissent is usually carried out by those who are dissatisfied with the actions of public organizations, programs, or people, but typically, for strategic reasons, choose not to go public with their concerns in whole or in part. Rather than acting openly, guerrillas often move clandestinely behind the scenes, salmon swimming against the current of power. Guerrillas run the spectrum from anti-establishment liberals to fundamentalist conservatives, from constructive contributors to deviant destroyers.

Three public managers with significant experience comment on O'Leary's thesis that guerrilla government is about the power of career bureaucrats; the tensions between career bureaucrats and political appointees; organization culture; and what it means to act responsibly, ethically, and with integrity as a public servant. Karl Sleight, former director of the New York State Ethics Commission; David Warm, executive director of the Mid-America Regional Council of Greater Kansas City; and Ralph R, Bauer, former deputy regional administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the Seattle and Chicago regions, present unique perspectives on the "guerrilla" influence on policy and management, as well as the challenges posed by this ever-present public management phenomenon.

Guerrilla: One who engages in irregular warfare especially as a member of an independent unit.

—Webster's New College Dictionary, 2008

"Fire the bastard!" I can still hear my boss yelling at me, instructing me to get rid of my most creative and passionate employee. I was 28 years old and the director of policy and planning for a state environmental agency. My employee, earnestly dedicated to environmental concerns, had turned into a "guerrilla," working clandestinely with environmental groups and the media, leaking data, and showing up at night-time public hearings blasting the governor and my boss for "caveman-era water policies." He was seeking to accomplish outside the organization what he could not accomplish within the organization.

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"Guerrilla government" is my term for the actions of career public servants who work against the wishes—either implicitly or explicitly communicated—of their superiors. Guerrilla government is a form of dissent that is usually carried out by those who are dissatisfied with the actions of public organizations, programs, or people, but typically, for strategic reasons, choose not to go public with their concerns in whole or in part. A few guerrillas end up outing themselves as whistle-blowers, but most do not.

Rather than acting openly, guerrillas often choose to remain "in the closet," moving clandestinely behind the scenes, salmon swimming upstream against the current of power. Over the years, I have learned that the motivations driving guerrillas are diverse. Their reasons for acting range from the altruistic (doing the right thing) to the seemingly petty (I was passed over for that promotion). Taken as a whole, their acts are as awe inspiring as saving human lives out of a love of humanity and as trifling as slowing the issuance of a report out of spite or anger. Guerrillas run the spectrum from anti-establishment liberals to fundamentalist conservatives, from constructive contributors to deviant destroyers. Guerrilla government is about the power of career bureaucrats; the tensions between career bureaucrats and political appointees; and organization culture and what it means to act responsibly, ethically, and with integrity as a public servant.

Most guerrillas work on the assumption that their work outside their agencies provides them a latitude that is not available in formal settings. Some want to see interest groups join, if not replace, formal government as the foci of power. Some are tired of hardball power politics and seek to replace it with collaboration and inclusivity. Others are implementing their own version of hardball politics. Most have a wider conceptualization of their work than that articulated by their agency's formal and informal statements of mission, but some are more freewheeling, doing what feels right to them. Some are committed to a particular methodology, technique, or idea. For some, guerrilla activity is a form of expressive behavior that allows them leverage on issues about which they feel deeply. For others, guerrilla activity is a way of carrying out extreme viewpoints on pressing public policy problems.

Guerrillas bring the credibility of the formal, bureaucratic, political system with them, as well as the credibility of their individual professions. They tend to be independent, multipolar, and sometimes radical. They often have strong views that their agency's perspective on public policy problems is at best insufficient, at worst illegal. They are not afraid to reach into new territory and often seek to drag the rest of the system with them to explore new possibilities.

At the same time, guerrillas run the risk of being unregulated themselves. Sometimes they fail to see the big picture, promoting policies that may not be compatible with the system as a whole. Sometimes they are so caught up in fulfilling their own expressive and instrumental purposes that they may not fulfill the purposes of their organization. This is the dilemma of guerrilla government.

Every seasoned public official with whom I have discussed guerrilla government agrees that it happens, and has offered his or her own stories and examples of this phenomenon. For example, I received the following e-mail message in response to my call for stories of guerrilla government:

> I worked for 35 years as a federal employee and now teach at American University. The instances of guerrilla government are far more widespread than you imagine….

Three Lenses

The great thinkers in the social sciences have for years grappled with guerrilla government under very different labels and in very diverse ways. There are three major lenses or vantage points from which to view guerrilla government that emerge from the social science literature; each offers a different type of understanding. The three lenses are bureaucratic politics, organizations and management, and ethics (see figure 1).

Bureaucratic Politics

The bureaucratic politics literature is vast and spans several decades. The key points about bureaucratic politics are that career public servants make policy through the exercise of discretion (Appleby 1949), and that public administration is a political process (Appleby 1949; Cleveland 1956; Key 1958; Stein 1952). Moreover, bureaucrats and bureaucracy are driven by their own highly particularized and parochial views, interests, and values (Long 1949), and bureaucrats' views tend to be influenced by the unique culture of their agencies (Halperin and Kanter 1973). All bureaucracies are endowed
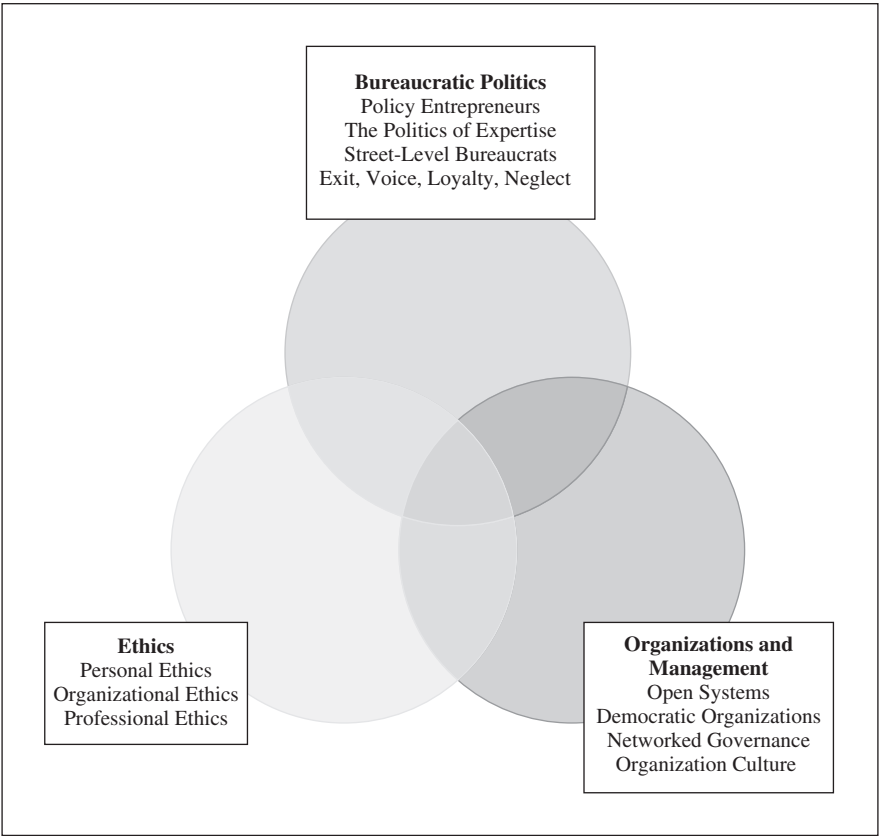

Bureaucratic Politics
Policy Entrepreneurs
The Politics of Expertise
Street-Level Bureaucrats
Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect

Ethics
Personal Ethics
Organizational Ethics
Professional Ethics

Organizations and Management
Open Systems
Democratic Organizations
Networked Governance
Organization Culture

Figure 1 Guerrilla Government

with certain resources that career public servants may use to get their way: policy expertise, longevity and continuity, and responsibility for program implementation (Rourke 1984). Agencies and bureaucrats within agencies often seek to co-opt outside groups as a means of averting threats (Selznick 1949).

Two relevant literatures with different twists consist of writings on policy entrepreneurs and the politics of expertise. Policy entrepreneurs are "advocates who are willing to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, money—to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive or solitary benefits" (Kingdon 2003, 179). Riccucci (1995) focused on "execucrat" policy entrepreneurs—career public executives who made a difference.

Guerrilla government is a mutant cross-pollination of policy entrepreneur and the politics of expertise. The politics of expertise is a term used by Benveniste (1973), who examined why and how experts influence public and private policy. In an argument reminiscent of the one that knocked down the politics–administration dichotomy, Benveniste argued that so-called neutral experts (in the planning field in his study) are in fact involved in politics, and that "politics is never devoid of ideological content" (1973, 21). It is time to "shed the mask" of neutrality, Benveniste argued, and for professional public servants to admit that they are both experts and committed political actors.

Lewis phrased the same sentiment in a different way:

> Among the many resources employed by public bureaucracies, professionalism and expertise are particularly significant. . . . When coupled with the ancient notion of the primacy of the state, they make for a formidable source of power. (1977, 158)

Lewis went on to point out that with this expertise comes specialized knowledge, professional norms, and prolonged attention to issues that outlive the attention that others in the political process can give. Hence, professionalized public bureaucrats have a capacity to initiate and innovate that is unparalleled in the political system.

Three great works spanning three different decades have tried to grapple intellectually with the dilemma of guerrilla government in three very different ways. Kaufman in *The Forest Ranger* concluded, among other things, that despite attempts to forge a tightly run Forest Service and a nearly all-obeying forest ranger, "[i]n the last analysis all influences on administrative behavior are filtered through a screen of individual values, concepts, and images" (1960, 223). Hirschman in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970) outlined a typology of responses to dissatisfaction: exit (leaving, quitting, or ending the relationship), voice (expressing one's dissatisfaction), and loyalty (faithfully waiting for conditions to improve). Farrell (1983) added a fourth element to Hirschman's work: neglect. Lipsky in *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) analyzed the actions and roles of "front-line" public servants, such as police officers and social workers, and argued that they are essentially policy makers. This phenomenon

is built on two interrelated facets of their positions: relatively high degrees of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority.

These are just a few of the points made in the bureaucratic politics literature that are relevant to an examination of guerrilla government. The bureaucratic politics lens raises important questions concerning who controls our government organizations; the accountability of public servants; the roles, responsibility, and responsiveness of bureaucrats in a democratic society; and the tensions between career public servants and political appointees.

Organizations and Management

Classic organization theorists such as Cyert and March (1963), Emery and Trist (1965), Katz and Kahn (1966), Thompson (1967), Lawrence and Lorsch (1969), and Aldrich (1972) all maintained that organizations both are shaped by and seek to shape the environment in which they exist. This "open systems" approach to understanding organizations maintains that organizations are in constant interaction with their environments, that organization boundaries are permeable, and that organizations both consume resources and export resources to the outside world. In other words, organizations do not exist in a vacuum.

This notion contrasts with traditional theories that tend to view organizations as closed systems, causing an overemphasis on the internal functioning of an organization. While the internal functioning of an organization is significant and cannot be ignored, it is essential to remember that all organizations "swim" in often tumultuous environments that affect every level of the organization. The open systems perspective is important when analyzing public organizations, and it is especially important when thinking about guerrilla government. Public organizations, such as those profiled in my research, seek to thrive in environments that are influenced by the concerned public, elected officials, the judiciary, interest groups, and nongovernmental organizations, to name just a few. Working with, and being influenced by, individuals and groups outside one's organization has long been a fact of life for public servants (Brownlow 1955; Gaus 1947; Stillman 2004; Wildavsky 1964).

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Perhaps the most exciting modern offshoot of the open systems perspective is that of networked governance. Networks are spider webs of relationships and connections between and among individuals and organizations dedicated to a common purpose. Every guerrilla profiled in my research was part of, and used to his or her advantage, an extensive network. The following definition is adapted from O'Toole (1997), McGuire (2003) and Agranoff (2004):

> Networks are structures of interdependence, involving multiple nodes, such as agencies and organizations, with multiple linkages. Networks may be formal or informal. They may plan, design, produce and deliver public goods or services. They may be a blend of public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

These authors help us understand the reality of the spider web of acquaintances and partnerships in which the guerrillas studied in my research thrived.

Ethics

Ethics is the study of values and how to define right and wrong action (Cooper 1998, 2001; Menzel 1999; Van Wart 1996). Waldo (1988) offered a map of the ethical obligations of public servants, with special reference to the United States. His map is still relevant today, and it is especially applicable to the issue of guerrilla government. In his map, Waldo identified a dozen sources and types of ethical obligations, but cautioned that the list is capable of "indefinite expansion" (1988, 103), and that the obligations do not lend themselves to any prioritization.

Waldo's 12 ethical obligations are presented in figure 2. The message of Waldo's map of ethical obligations is that different public servants will be compelled by different ethical obligations. This makes iron-clad conclusions about whether guerrillas are right or wrong difficult at times. Compounding this analytical challenge is the "problem of ambiguity" in making ethical determinations (Cooper 1998; Dobel 1999; Fleishman 1981; Rohr 1988).

Case Studies of Guerrilla Government

My research has detailed several case studies of guerrilla government. (For a more detailed treatment, see O'Leary 2006). Consider the following:

- Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat stationed in Nazi Lithuania during World War II who clandestinely signed an estimated 10,000 visas to save the lives of Jewish refugees.
- Mark Felt, the second in command in the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the 1970s, whose secret leads to reporters exposed the Watergate scandal and eventually brought down President Richard M. Nixon.
- The "Nevada Four," three scientists from the U.S. Department of Interior and one from the Nevada Department of Wildlife, who successfully got a bill passed through Congress to dedicate water to the Nevada wetlands, legislation against which their superiors testified.
- Dave Wegner, a scientist with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, who led an environmental war to save the Grand Canyon.
- A hospital assistant administrator who clandestinely examined the files of patients in order to gather evidence to bust an incompetent doctor.
- A radar support staff person in a U.S. federal agency that predicts natural disasters who clandestinely e-mailed, against the wishes of his superior, 7,500 "customers" and notified them that their service was about to be cut down from 24 hours to 12 hours per day.
- An attorney in a regulatory agency who e-mailed, against the wishes of his superior, those who would be affected by a new regulation, asking for their input and help in designing the best regulation possible.
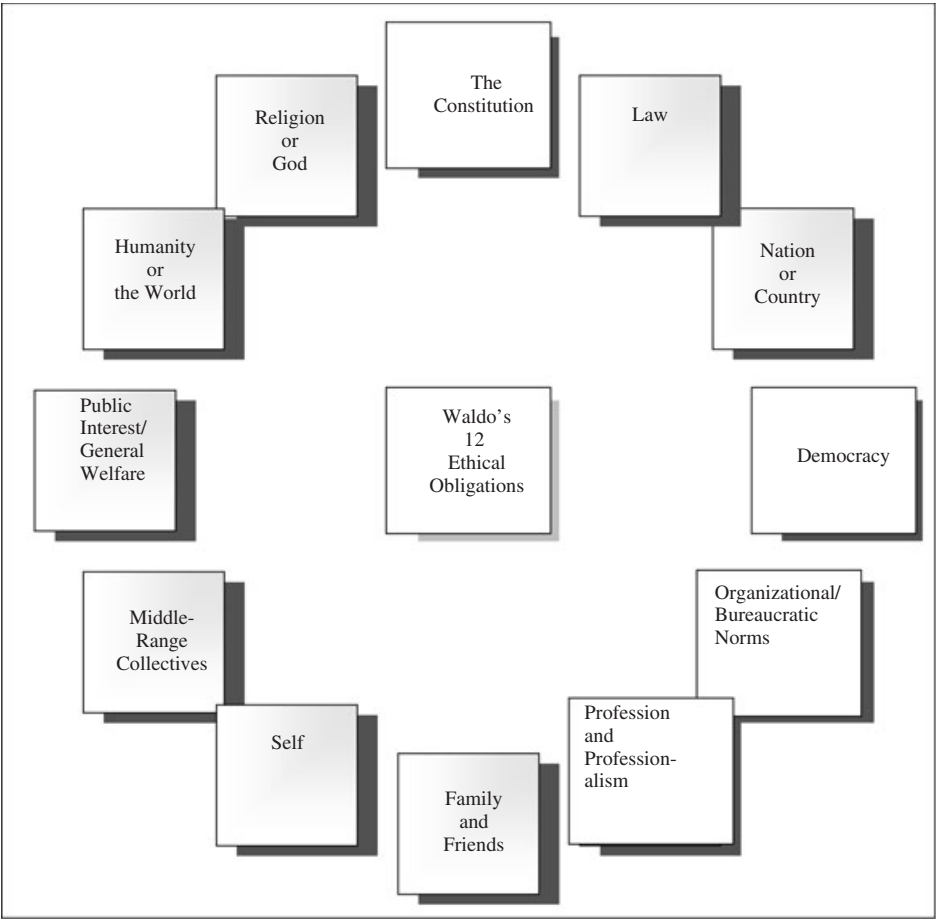

Figure 2 Waldo's 12 Ethical Obligations

- An army civilian who leaked an e-mail to environmental non-governmental organizations indicating that the general in charge was advising staff to cut costs whenever possible, including taking "additional environmental risks."
- A state department of transportation employee who repaired a train gate where children were playing against the wishes of his superior "because it was the right thing to do."
- The scientific staff in the Environmental Protection Agency's Seattle regional office during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who clandestinely planned a unified staff strategy refusing to implement some of the orders of the new regional directors in order to protect the environment and obey the law.
- Employees in state environmental agencies who, without agency policy or budgets, expanded their integrated pest management programs because they deemed them crucially important from a public health standpoint, especially for children.
- Claude Ferguson, a ranger with the U.S. Forest Service, who joined a lawsuit filed by environmentalists against his own agency because it allowed off-road vehicles in the Hoosier National Forest.
- Doug Kerr, a conservation officer from the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, who, against the wishes of his superiors, documented fraud and violation of environmental laws in the laying of the Iroquois pipeline from Canada to New York City in the 1990s, resulting in one of the largest environmental fines in U.S. history, second only to the Alaska *Exxon Valdez* oil spill fine.

Cross-Case Analysis: Guerrilla Government: Ethical or Insubordinate?

Taken as a whole, the stories of guerrilla government profiled in my research illustrate several common themes concerning the power of career public servants that cross policy and temporal lines. The themes also yield implications for public policy, public management, ethics, and governance. The major themes represented in these cases and others like them may be categorized into different harsh realities.

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Harsh Reality #1: Guerrilla government is here to stay. Ask any seasoned long-term public servant whether guerrilla government exists, and their answer is likely to be "it happens." Ask them whether it is a good or bad thing, and their answer will probably be "it depends." Then, they are apt to launch into stories that communicate their wonder, disgust, or something in between at the guerrilla government episodes they have personally experienced or have heard about (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003).

Whether seen as good or bad, the potential role of government guerrillas in influencing policy and programs is immense. The cases highlighted in my research capture the actions of, and the methods used by, career public servants to affect the policies and programs of their bureaucracies from outside their organizations. These cases present a useful contrast to the stereotype of the government bureaucrat who is interested only in a stable job, few risks, and a dependable retirement.

As the bureaucratic politics literature so aptly communicates, for better or for worse, bureaucrats and bureaucracies—whether it is your local post office, the state division of motor vehicles, or the U.S. Department of the Interior—are immensely powerful. This is a fact of life in the open systems and open organizations of public management. While the intensity of guerrilla government activities will ebb and flow, guerrilla government itself will never completely disappear.

Harsh Reality #2: Guerrillas can do it to you in ways you'll never know. There are as many techniques of guerrilla government as there are guerrillas. Here are a few examples. (For additional examples, see O'Leary 2006.)

- Obey your superiors in public, but disobey them in private
- Ghost-write letters, testimony, and studies for supportive interest groups
- Fail to correct superiors' mistakes: let them fall
- Neglect policies and directives you disagree with—stall
- Fail to implement orders you think are unfair
- Hold clandestine meetings to plot a unified staff strategy
- Secretly contact members of Congress and other elected officials, as well as their staffs, in an effort to cultivate them as allies
- Build public–private partnerships
- Build partnerships among entities at all levels of government
- Forge links with outside groups: other professionals, nongovernmental organizations, concerned citizens
- Cultivate a positive relationships with the media; leak information to the media, from informal tips to formal press releases
- Cultivate positive relationships with interest groups

These are all methods utilized by dissatisfied public servants to address perceived wrongs and to influence their organizations' policies. They have manifested themselves in actions ranging from putting a work order at the bottom of the desk drawer and "forgetting" about it, to slipping information to a legislative staff person, to outright insubordination. Some of these were strategies that managers of the guerrillas knew about, while other actions were strategies that were completely hidden from view. Realistically, absent hiring a full-time private detective, public managers need to realize that they will always have limited knowledge about, and control over, the career public servants in their organizations.

Professionalized bureaucrats dominate information creation, analysis, and transmission, giving them a capacity to structure and suppress alternatives and premises (Lewis 1977). The alternatives from which politicians and political appointees choose a particular action usually are drawn up by career public servants, who will naturally build in their own professional biases and desires (Milward 1980). Therefore, it is difficult for a political appointee manager to know what he or she is getting in the way of analysis from these experts, who are simultaneously claimants on scarce public resources.

As one public manager put it, "They can do it to you in ways that you'll never know. [Career public servants] . . . can give you less

than their best effort and it's hard to tell. Or in the worst case, if they were angry enough, they could set you up. They are very smart people—you don't want to fool with them. You need to treat them with respect in a participatory way" (O'Leary et al. 1999, 274).

Another public manager opined, "Staff have figured out that if they don't like the decision the manager makes, they can go to the press, or Congress, or to an . . . interest group. When that happens, you've got a real big problem. If you take the position that you are going to take on an issue that is contrary to staff recommendations, you damn well better go in and explain it with them in depth before you make the decision. Otherwise you are going to find yourself defending your decision in the press or at a congressional hearing" (O'Leary et al. 1999, 274).

Still a third manager put it this way: "I've seen a number of managers get into trouble by blowing off staff concerns and not being willing to debate the issues with them. . . . Generally they (staff) will accept the reality of making political accommodations on occasion as long as you don't get too cavalier with the facts. The important thing is you've got to be willing to sit down with them and. . . explain your decisions to them" (O'Leary et al. 1999, 273–74). Otherwise, you may be in big trouble

Harsh Reality #3: All guerrilla activity is not created equal.
How does one know when a government guerrilla is a canary in the coal mine who needs to be listened to, or a delusional single-issue fanatic? We all know the negative stories of guerrillas within metropolitan police departments whose view of policing are at odds with their department, but believe they are promoting the public interest in crime control.

And then there are the nuts or the misguided. One self-labeled guerrilla sent me his entire personnel file, which measured over a foot high. He is a persecuted guerrilla, he wrote, and it all started when a consultant bought him a $5 hamburger at McDonald's and refused reimbursement. The employee reported the incident to his superior, citing ethics rules that mandate arm's-length relationships between consultants and state employees. His superior advised him to forget it, as it was only a $5 hamburger, and they had more important things to do with their time. Incensed, the employee filed a complaint against his superior and waged a clandestine war to get the consultant barred from future state contracts and his superior fired. His personnel file documents that he eventually filed seven separate complaints against seven separate superiors, working his way up the chain of command. When asked why he did what he did, his response was that he wanted to "do the right thing."

But most cases are not this crazy or this easy to dismiss. While it is undeniable that government guerrillas as public servants must be accountable and responsive to the public, it is sometimes difficult to sort out the "ethical" guerrillas from the "unethical" guerrillas, the guided from the misguided. For example, what or who, exactly, is "the public" in these instances? Possible "masters" that a public servant might have include the public as interest group, the public as consumer

(of government products), the public as represented by an elected official, the public as client (served by "street-level bureaucrats"), and the public as citizen (Frederickson 1991).

Even when the outcome of guerrilla government activity is beneficial, the ethics of guerrilla government actions can be difficult to sort out. Take the "Nevada Four"—three scientists from the U.S. Department of Interior and one from the Nevada Department of Wildlife who led a clandestine environmental war to save the wetlands in the state of Nevada and successfully got a bill passed through Congress—legislation against which their superiors testified. Did they act in a manner that can be deemed accountable and responsive to the public? Yes and no. All government organizations are to implement the will of the people as mandated by legislation enacted by elected representatives. Yet, in the Nevada Four case, by not being constrained by the prevailing their agencies' interpretations of congressional and state will and promoting new wetlands legislation, the Nevada Four promoted innovative policies that, in the end, also must be seen as the will of the people, as they eventually were enacted by Congress and approved by the people of Nevada in a referendum. Both sets of legislation were supported by the public: interest groups, consumers, elected representatives, clients, and citizens. At the same time, both sets of legislation were opposed by differing factions of the same public.

Examining this phenomenon through the lens of Waldo's 12 competing ethical obligations, it is important to note that the guerrillas I have studied clearly did not see their allegiance, accountability, and responsiveness to their organizations as their first priority. In fact, the comments of the guerrillas I have studied make it clear that they consider organizational pressures barriers to "doing the right thing."

The paradox of this situation can be seen in the fact that the Nevada Four's motto was "embarrass the government!" when, of course, they *were* the government. In the end, their primary commitment was not to the organization, nor to the public as interest group, the public as consumer, the public as elected representative, the public as client, or the public as citizen. Rather, they saw their primary commitment as to themselves, as in, "to thine own self be true."

Whose Ethics?
The issue then becomes, whose ethics? Did the government guerrillas who circumvented their superiors in order to save the environment act with integrity, responsibility, and ethics? Some might say yes; some might say no. Assuming that they had a wholehearted disposition to "do the right and just thing" (Fleishman 1981) in all circumstances, and made their decisions based on self-conscious reflection, honesty, and a resistance of temptation and acted on their beliefs and commitments, the answer is yes. To environmental and conservation groups, clearly part of the guerrillas' public, their actions are examples of brilliant entrepreneurship (Doig and Hargrove 1987; Riccucci 1995). They clearly are considered heroic bureaucrats (Couto 1991) in the eyes of these interest groups, consumers, clients, and citizens. They are policy entrepreneurs as illuminated by Lewis (1980) and Kingdon (2003). The Nevada

> Did the government guerrillas who circumvented their superiors in order to save the environment act with integrity, responsibility, and ethics?

Four's actions were touted as the highest service to our country by a member of the Sierra Club, which rewarded them with a public service award.

To others, however, some actions of the guerrillas are seen as outrageous insubordination. While Claude Ferguson, the Forest Service employee who sued his agency in order to halt the use of off-road vehicles in the Hoosier National Forest, received many letters of support, he and the local newspapers received numerous letters from citizens who were aghast that he would assertively argue for what they perceived to be his own policy preferences. To some, the career public servants in the Environmental Protection Agency's Seattle regional office during the Reagan administration who planned clandestine meetings in order to plot a unified staff strategy against their anti-environment bosses are the embodiment of stubborn and misguided institutionalization: long-timers who represent a different culture from the new political leaders voted in by the American people. To others, they are the epitome of the dedicated public servant.

But suppose these guerrillas were antiblack, anti-Muslim skinheads who used these tools to undermine federal civil rights actions? What if they were Religious Right fundamentalists dedicated to crippling fetal tissue research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health? If this were the case, this savvy use of the same public management tools would most likely be looked at as manipulative, troublesome, and unethical. In fact, one of the Nevada Four who reviewed a draft of my research findings expressed a fear that my work may become "guidance to mid-level bureaucrats whose political motivation and personal ambition exceeds ethical and legal standards and requirements" (correspondence with the author, 2004).

Guerrilla government incidents are often examples of what one scholar of administrative ethics called the "problem of ambiguity" (Rohr 1988). These government guerrillas, like most public servants, have many masters, competing ethical obligations, and multiple directions of accountability. To some they are brilliant entrepreneurs. To others they are deviant insubordinates.

What can we take, then, from these episodes in the way of ethical insight? At the very least, important questions emerge that potential government guerrillas should ask themselves before deciding whether to go the guerrilla government route:

• Am I correct? More than a sincere belief is needed.
• Is the feared damage immediate, permanent, and irreversible? Are safety and health issues involved? Or is there time for a longer view and a more open strategy?
• Am I adhering to the rule of law?
• Is there a legitimate conflict of laws?
• Is this an area that is purely and legitimately discretionary?
• Were all reasonable alternative avenues pursued?
• Would it be more ethical to promote transparency rather than working clandestinely?
• Would it be more ethical to work with sympathetic legislators before turning to media and outside groups?
• Is whistle-blowing a preferable route?

This will remain a difficult area of public management to sort out, making it challenging for managers to know whether and when to nurture, tolerate, or terminate such employees. It is a fact that all guerrilla activity is not created equal. How a public manager decides which behavior is legitimate and which crosses unacceptable boundaries could be the most important question of one's career.

Harsh Reality #4: Most public organizations are inadequately equipped to deal effectively with guerrilla government. My research has shown that there are at least four primary conditions that tend to yield a situation that encourages the festering of guerrilla government activities. These may occur alone or in combination with another:

• When internal opportunities for voicing one's dissent are limited or decline
• When the perceived cost of voicing one's opposition is greater than the perceived cost of guerrilla government activities
• When the issues involved are personalized or the subject of deeply held values
• When quitting one's job or leaving one's agency is seen as having a destructive (rather than a salutary) effect on the policies of concern.

Some of these conditions may be addressed by applying key ideas found in conflict resolution theory. The conflict resolution literature asks whether there is an alterative avenue—perhaps an internal organizational channel—available through which to bring government guerrillas back into the organization, despite their inherent mistrust of regular channels (Brower and Abolafia 1997). Is there a way to channel their energy for the common good? Is there a way to resolve small conflicts before they escalate into guerrilla warfare?

In contrast to the idea of Hirschman and his followers that the four primary options available to disgruntled employees are exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect, the conflict resolution literature offers its own view of the four options available to disillusioned employees: avoidance, collaboration, higher authority, and unilateral power play (Slaikeu 1998). Avoidance means that no action is taken to resolve the conflict. Collaboration can be an individual initiative, negotiation among the parties, or mediation by a third party. Higher authority is referral up the line of supervision or chain of command, internal appeals, formal investigation, or litigation. Unilateral power play can include behind-the-scenes maneuvering, physical violence, or strikes. The guerrilla government approach examined in this study is often a combination of collaboration, unilateral power play, and higher authority.

"Dispute system design" is a phrase coined by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1988) to describe an organization's effort to diagnose and improve the way it manages conflict. A systems approach to dispute system design that identifies those subsystems that make up the whole and examines how well they interact collectively in order to discover how to improve them is important (Constantino and Merchant 1996). Only in the last 10 to 15 years have large organizations begun to create conflict management systems—especially large public organizations. It is a relatively new idea that an organization's conflict management system is intricately involved in the effectiveness of the entire organization.

The Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (which in 2001 merged with the Association for Conflict Resolution and is now

named after the latter organization) combined the best practices in this area to form recommendations for integrated conflict management system design. These include encouraging employees and managers (such as the guerrillas profiled here) to voice concerns and constructive dissent early, integrating collaborative problem-solving approaches into the culture of the organization, encouraging direct negotiation among the parties in a dispute, and aligning conflict management practices with each other and with the mission, vision, and values of the organization. From this work come five essential characteristics of integrated conflict management systems that are applicable and relevant to guerrilla government (SPIDR 2001):

1. Options for addressing all types of problems are available to all people in the workplace, including employees, supervisors, professionals, and managers.
2. A culture that welcomes dissent and encourages resolution of conflict at the lowest level through direct negotiation is created.
3. Multiple access points and persons who are easily identified as knowledgeable and trustworthy for approaching with advice about a conflict or the system are provided. Examples include ombuds who help parties find ways to work within the system, and attorneys who coach employees and managers regarding collaborative methods.
4. Multiple options for addressing conflicts, including rights-based (such as when legal or contractual rights have been violated) and interest-based (such as negotiation and mediation) processes exist.
5. A systemic structure that coordinates and supports the multiple access points and multiple options and integrates effective conflict management practices into daily organizational operations is provided.

To these I would add,

6. Employees are educated formally concerning the value and importance of dissent, as well as the most appropriate ways of voicing that dissent.
7. Managers are aware of the "informal" organization that is not manifest on an organization chart and use it to get the message out concerning the value and importance of dissent.
8. Managers are visible, accessible, and available to the employees.
9. Evaluation is a two-way street, with managers evaluating those they supervise, and employees evaluating managers.
10. Managers practice symbolic management, positively reinforcing the dissenting "conversations" they seek to encourage.
11. Dissenters are assured of, and given, confidentiality when requested.

The point is to create and promote a workplace climate in which disputes are addressed constructively and resolved. Our public organizations need to learn how to tap into the potentially insightful, creative ideas and energy of dissenters in order to make constructive changes in the system when appropriate.

This is one of the few areas of public management in which the literature and theory are ahead of the day-to-day practice. There is a

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need for sweeping reform of public organizations concerning institutional processes and procedures for dealing with dissenters. Only then will we see instances of guerrilla government decrease.

Harsh Reality #5: The tensions inherent in guerrilla government will never be resolved. The dilemma of guerrilla government is truly a public policy paradox: There is a need for accountability and control in our government organizations, but that same accountability and control can stifle innovation and positive change. Put another way, there is a need in government for career bureaucrats who are policy innovators and risk takers; at the same time, there is a need in government for career bureaucrats who are policy sustainers. Hence, the actions of the government guerrillas studied in my research are manifestations of the complex environment in which our public managers function, and every public manager needs to be aware of this.

Inherent in this paradox are many perennial clashing public management tensions and issues. These tensions include the need for control versus the perceived need to disobey, the need for hierarchy versus the need for local autonomy, and built-in tensions in the organizational structures and missions of organizations themselves. Other issues include the following: To whom are these career public servants accountable? To whom are they to be responsive? Whose ethical standards are they to follow to gauge whether their own behaviors are responsible?

Embedded in the traditional cornerstones of public management are the concepts of hierarchical control and accountability. In large bureaucracies such as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, or the Environmental Protection Agency, or even in a small state or local agency with a meager staff, it would be difficult to argue that there is not a valid need for control of employees and obedience to the policies and procedures dictated from the top of the organization. If all employees in these organizations actively disobeyed orders and made policy decisions based on their own personal agendas and interests, no matter how heartfelt, chaos would reign and the organization might fail to exist as a coherent whole. The public interest clearly would not be served.

At the same time, even acknowledging the potential dark side to guerrilla government (see, e.g., Adams and Balfour 2004), the major force driving all of the career bureaucrats studied in my research was neither disobedience for the sake of disobedience nor pure self-interest. Rather, each expressed that they were driven by outrage at the perceived actual or potential harm caused by their agencies' policies. Each expressed being driven by a personal sense of what is right. Just as it is difficult to argue that there is no need for obedience by employees, it is difficult to argue *overall* that acting on one's strongly held personal beliefs *in these contexts* was improper.

Advice from the Pros

Assuming that guerrilla government is significant and should be a last resort (or near last resort) of dissenters, what else might be done to reduce it, in addition to attention to dispute system design, organization dynamics, and integrating the expressive and

instrumental objectives of organizations? One possible answer lies in the training of new political appointees entering government for the first time at significant organization levels. A mandatory two-day (minimum) training course is necessary, explaining their own subordination to the rule of law, constitutional requirements, the nature of legislative oversight, the desirability of working with career employees, and what it takes to lead in public agencies. My research concludes that guerrilla activity may be promoted by foolish moves by political appointees who think they have a mandate based on rhetoric uttered by a president while on the campaign trail and who think that career public administrators should be, and will be, the robotic implementers of the will of their superiors. Political appointees, as well as other high-level administrators, need to know that their capacity to destroy new ideas is as great as their capacity to create them.

Of course, there will always be times when public managers will have to quash negative guerrilla government. Examples include, but are not limited to, when rights are in danger of being violated, laws are broken, or people may get hurt. Yet scholars who have studied empirically whether career public servants "work, shirk, or sabotage" find that bureaucrats in the United States largely are highly principled, hardworking, responsive, and functioning (Brehm and Gates 1997, 195–202; see also Feldman 1989; Golden 2000; Goodsell 2004; Wood and Waterman 1991, 1994). Hence, when there are incidents of guerrilla government, managers need to view them as potentially serious messages that need to be heard. Thus, part of the training of political appointees, as well as other public managers, should be the communication of the conclusion that our first line of defense can no longer be dismissing government guerrillas as mere zealots or trouble makers. This perspective acknowledges the central importance of dissent in organizations.

In 2005, I surveyed members of the National Academy of Public Administration, an independent, nonpartisan organization chartered by Congress to assist federal, state, and local governments in improving their effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability; alumni of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University; and some of the veteran managers on the NASA Return to Flight Task Group that I served on after the *Columbia* space shuttle accident. I asked them about the value of dissent in organizations. Of the 216 current and former managers who responded, 213 indicated that dissent, when managed properly, is not only positive, but essential to a healthy organization. Consider this observation by Sean O'Keefe, former administrator of NASA: "Embracing dissent means inviting diversity of opinion from the people around you. My first rule is to never surround myself with people who are just like me. My second rule is to always insist upon someone voicing the dissenting opinion. Always." Here are the top six suggestions from the seasoned managers I surveyed:

1. Create an organization culture that accepts, welcomes, and encourages candid dialogue and debate. Cultivate a questioning attitude by encouraging staff to challenge the assumptions and actions of the organization. More than 200 of the 216 managers who responded to my survey emphasized that dissent, when managed well, can foster innovation and creativity. In particular, dissent can help generate multiple options that might not normally be considered by the organization. Managers should think of dissent as an opportunity to discuss alternative notions of how to achieve a goal.

Cultivating the creative aspects behind dissent can lead to greater participation, higher job satisfaction, and, ultimately, better work product, the managers told me.

"Create an atmosphere where dissent is not seen as antagonistic or nonsupportive of the initiative being considered," suggested John Nalbandian, the former mayor of Lawrence, Kansas, a professor at the University of Kansas, and a member of the National Academy of Public Administration. "I wouldn't even call it dissent. Dissent implies revolution. Progress need not mean total revolt. Call it discussion."

2. Listen. More than 200 of the 216 managers who responded to my survey cited listening as one of the most important ways to manage dissent. This means listening not only to the actual words being said, but also what is behind the language of dissent. This also means communicating that one is looking for the best solution, then tuning into the underlying reasons for, or root problems of, the dissent.

As Karl Sleight, former director of the New York State Ethics Commission put it, "The hallmark of a strong leader is to be a good listener. Not just hear the dissent, but to probe it, evaluate it, challenge the underpinnings (without discarding it out of hand), and make a reasoned decision on whether the dissent has a viable position. The value of simply paying attention to dissent should not be underestimated. If the members of the organization know that the leader is comfortable with his/her leadership position, so to allow (even embrace) differing points of view, dissent can breed loyalty and a stronger organization. Obviously, the converse is also very true."

3. Understand the organization both formally and informally. The majority of managers who responded to my survey emphasized that leaders must understand the organization both formally and informally. Cooper explains the importance of this concept for ethical decision making:

> Complying with the organization's informal norms and procedures is ordinarily required of a responsible public administrator. These are the specific organizational means for structuring and maintaining work that is consistent with the organization's legitimate mission. Because not everything can be written down formally, and recognizing that informally evolved norms give cohesion and identity to an organization, these unofficial patterns of practice play an essential role. However, at times these controls may subvert the mission or detract from its achievement, as in goal displacement. A truly responsible administrator will bear an obligation to propose changes when they become problematic for the wishes of the public, inconsistent with professional judgment, or in conflict with personal conscience. It is irresponsible to simply ignore or circumvent inappropriate norms and procedures on the one hand, or reluctantly comply with them on the other. (1998, 256–57)

The informal organization may be more difficult to identify, but it is often the environment within which dissent grows and develops. Dissent coming from the informal organization may be solely a sign

of some disgruntled employees or it may be a legitimate, telltale sign of a significant issue within the organization. Dissent becomes productive when the members of the organization recognize and believe that the leaders are honestly concerned about them and are willing to work on making positive changes. At the same time, dissenters must also recognize that the structure of some organizations will prevent the type of change they hope to see (paramilitary organizations, for example).

4. Separate the people from the problem. More than half of those who responded to my survey emphasized the need to approach issues on their merits and people as human beings. Put another way, don't make it personal and don't take it personally. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991) reinforced this idea in their best-selling book *Getting to Yes,* in which they advise managers to separate the relationship from the substance, deal directly with the people problem, and strive to collaboratively solve the problem at hand.

A contracting officer at the Environmental Protection Agency put it this way: "Leaders must listen beyond the words and tone of the dissenters as sometimes their message is simply delivered the wrong way, and the message itself is valid. Leaders must try to understand where the dissenters are coming from; this shows respect for people and that can go a long way. When leaders handle dissent with respect, professional courtesy, and when necessary, the decision to 'agree to disagree,' people at least know they have been heard, which send powerful messages that the employees can speak out and will be heard."

Vito Sciscioli, director of operations for the city of Syracuse, New York, commented, "The most important thing regarding managing dissent is to make sure the dissenting opinion is what is addressed and not the person delivering it. Also, creating an atmosphere of 'I mean you no harm' is also critical to establishing an environment where the free flow of ideas is possible."

5. Create multiple channels for dissent. Many of the more seasoned managers who responded to my survey emphasized that it is important to realize that dissent happens in every organization. Therefore, if managers create a process that allows for dissent, employees will feel they can express their views and disagreements may be channeled into something productive. If dissent is stifled, this will only cause resentment. Set up a regular process to receive dissent. Be accessible. Have an open-door policy. Insist that employees come to you first. Allow employees to dissent in civil discourse in group meetings or in private through memos or conversations; some people who have great ideas that challenge the status quo do not like to display them publicly. A former director of the Office of Resource Management in the U.S. Department of Energy put it this way: "Set up a regular process to receive dissent. Lay the ground rules for civil discourse. Actively listen to it. Act upon it and follow up to ensure that there was action."

6. Create dissent boundaries and know when to stop. "Dissent is important," Sean O'Keefe told me, "but a leader has to know when to stay 'enough.' If taken too far, dissent can be like pulling the thread of a sweater too long and hard. . . eventually the sweater unravels." To illustrate this point, O'Keefe talked about his order to his staff

and his promise to Congress after the *Columbia* space shuttle disaster. He ordered the implementation of every one of the 15 items labeled by the Columbia Accident Investigation Board before another space shuttle was launched. There were dozens of discussions between and among the staff about his forcing them to comply with all 15 points, with plenty of dissenters. Some staff wanted to implement some of the items, but not all. Many argued about the wisdom of the board's recommendations themselves. But in the end, O'Keefe determined that in order to ensure a safer space shuttle program, he had to order that all 15 items be implemented—end of discussion.

Conclusion

Decision makers and others within organizations can easily become imprisoned in, and blinded by, their own thoughts and feelings about dissent because they are concerned solely with the particulars of their own careers, their own programs and their perspectives as separate beings. Public managers' overwhelming preoccupation with what comes across their desk ignores another more fundamental level of reality. When we neglect big picture we often only see one side of the dissent issue. It is a "problem": Dissenters are a "pain," "a thorn in my side," "an annoyance to deal with."

Many good ideas in public organizations go undeveloped because they deviate from the normal ways of doing things. Our public programs need to be pushed out of their safe zones—those places of mental and physical routine and normalcy—so that they can start to think differently. An organization culture that welcomes divergent thinking, or what Sean O'Keefe calls "diversity thinking," is essential.

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Networks, both formal and informal, should be encouraged when appropriate. Evidence derived from studies of networks indicates that "working through network structures provides a way of dealing with 'wicked problems' by bringing about systemic change. In the process, innovation and change in traditional methods of operation come to the fore" (Keast et al. 2004, 370). The networks manifested in the episodes in my research offered a "reality check" to ideas that had been incubating in the far recesses of government offices. The networks also allowed ideas to cross-pollinate. Last, the networks helped employees break out of status quo thinking. One sociologist, for example, concluded that new ideas often come from managers' contacts outside their immediate work group (Erard 2004).

Finally, government leaders need to invest in whole organization dispute systems. The challenges of guerrilla government will never cease to exist. Like the waves of the ocean, they will ebb and flow. The recurring waves may be changed, lessened, or softened by dispute management systems, but they will remain a fact of life for all public managers. Having multiple internal organizational outlets for potential and actual guerrillas and their ideas will only strengthen our public agencies. The survival and vibrancy of governments around the world depend on it.

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