The Management Impact of Elected Leaders: Attorneys General

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Abstract

The study of management has focused increasingly on the specific and unique demands of the government/public sector. Government agencies function in political turmoil which is most experienced by career employees and staff who remain despite changing administrations. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, this study sought to understand and explain the experiences of government employees working under the management of elected leaders at various Offices of the Attorney General. Ten staff ranging from assistant attorneys general to administrative assistants were interviewed to solicit their perceptions on being managed by a popularly elected leader. Analyses resulted in four themes of necessity: (a) consistent delivery of management, (b) consistent levels of communication, (c) stronger presence of the AG as leader/manager, and (d) removing stagnation of agency progress. Findings suggest that elected leaders should actively work to assist in the management of government employees by increasing transition communication, maintaining regular communication directly with the agency, and supporting a management program for current and potential managers. The study offers a new perspective regarding the challenges elected leaders face when beginning to lead and the frustrations the employees have in knowing what the elected leader is doing.

Employee Perceptions of Elected Leaders' Management: Attorneys General (AGs)

Elections, particularly in more recent decades, seem less focused on the specific management experiences and human relations skills of each candidate and more on the predetermined list of each candidate's issues of interest (Czarnezki, 2005). Publicly elected leaders often win positions, not because of management ability, but because of campaigns based on political dialogue, promises, and popularity (Hollander, Fallon, & Edwards, 1977; Selzer, 2006). Often election success is based purely on popularity, dissatisfaction with incumbents, image, or popular issues of the day (Borgne & Lockwood, 2006; Kapeliush, 1978). Issues such as immigration, wars, moral beliefs, and the economy often dictate the election conversation. These topics shift decision making further from the desires of the public or best interests of a government agency and more toward party preferences (Borgne & Lockwood, 2006; Ink, 1976; Potter, 1962). Thus, if voters are making decisions based on political rhetoric and popularity instead of management ability, the concern becomes whether government agencies are led and managed effectively.

Howard, Foster, and Shannon (2005) challenged the belief that elected officials are a result of popular approval rather than in the identification of professional competence or management expertise. Once elected, leaders face not only the pressures of keeping campaign promises but also the task of managing and leading the office of the previous administrator (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Borgne & Lockwood, 2006; Hollander et al., 1977; Moncrief, 2005; Vigoda, 2000; Walker, 2005; Wilson, 2006). Management of government agencies requires overseeing sprawling organizations covering an entire state, region, or nation. Government leaders face a shift in organizational structure from traditional hierarchical bureaucracy to a network structure, which involves facing scrutiny by local and national media, voters,

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watchdog groups, and nongovernmental organizations (Bilmes & Gould, 2009).

Researchers have yet to agree on the best practice for selecting individuals for positions of legal influence that require both managing the organization and interpreting and acting within the law (Choi, Gulati, & Posner, 2008; Czarnezki, 2005; Nash, 2006; Wilson, 2006). Appointed and elected leaders may face term limits ranging from 2 to 8 years depending on the legislative limitations imposed on the position (Moncrief, 2005). Therefore, elected officials typically have only a few years to satisfy their campaign promises and to create the foundational cornerstone for their grander political ambitions (Bennett, 2005; Borgne & Lockwood, 2006; Moncrief, 2005; Walker, 2005).

In contrast to the elected leader, employees in these organizations often hold permanent roles, maintaining positions throughout numerous changes to the executive guard. To career employees, those typically customer-facing and in support positions, the perception and reception of a leader's subsequent management strategy may drive the general success or failure of an administration (Perkinson, 2006; U.S. Office of Personnel Management–Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness [OPM], 2001). This is important, as an elected leader's administration often depends most on the ability of middle managers to manage these employees strategically on behalf of the leader (Boyne, James, John, & Petrovsky, 2010; Buchen, 2005; McCann, Hassard, & Morris, 2004).

Elected Leaders' Management

Elected leaders are expected to develop strategies for establishing effective communication and engagement of all employees (Turner, 2007). However, the elected leader has a very specific agenda which can significantly affect the choices for management positions. As elected leaders create management teams, the decision about who fills the management function is as critical a consideration as the management style of the official (Daley & Lovrich, 2007). Elected officials often rely heavily on the executive and middle management teams they select for the implementation of the mission and management direction (Buchen, 2005). Those selected to middle and executive management roles by elected leaders often obtain the role based on expertise on a specific agenda issue, or roles on the election transition team, rather than management experience (Daley & Lovrich, 2007; Perkinson, 2006; C. Taylor, 2009; Walker, 2005; Wettenhall, 2003). Such situations also raise concern regarding middle management's ability to manage and thus engage career employees (OPM, 2001; Wright, 2009).

Imbedded in elected positions are additional controversial and emotionally charged political and social issues (Wilson, 2006). Elections arguably focus less on management ability, experience, or skill and more on acceptable positions concerning societal issues important to the voter. Therefore,

understanding leaders' management strategies is particularly critical for staff in government offices where leaders are elected for a finite period, as policies and directives may change periodically with new leaders. Borins (2000) noted that elected officials believe reinvention of goals and strategies, by relaxing organizational control, holds more risks than gains. Thus, a potential risk could be that officials might encourage the status quo rather than innovate employees. Few management researchers have considered the impact on leadership of electing individuals to administrator positions in public office, or even the employees' perceptions of elected leaders managing an agency (Luoma-aho, 2008; Nair, 2009). The career employees' perceptions of an elected leader's management may offer a missing perspective to the issue of effective management of elected leaders.

AGs Management

A commonly researched consideration in the legal arena of the public sector is the value of electing or appointing officials (Borgne & Lockwood, 2006; Bratton & Spill, 2002; Nash, 2006; Selzer, 2006; C. Taylor, 2009). Individuals elected to serve in legal positions in government carry numerous auxiliary duties other than office administration (Wright, 2009). AGs in particular, who act as the legal representation of a state, have the additional responsibility of pursuing various lawful issues affecting citizens and the state (National Association of Attorneys General [NAAG], n.d.; Wright, 2009). For AG offices, the executive leadership includes the AG, chief counsel (lawyers) who manage specific departments within the agency, and representatives of human resources, policy, and legislation (NAAG, n.d.; Office of the Arizona Attorney General [OAAG], n.d.). Forty-three state AGs obtain their position through popular elections (NAAG).

Government leaders are often quick to blame bureaucracy or the political divisions for administrators' failure to complete their respective campaign promises or official duties (Bilmes & Gould, 2009; Bozeman, 2000). The elected leaders' selection of the management team frequently escapes blame or consideration for administrators' failures. When electing a person for a leadership and management position, the voter should consider both the critical political issues and management of the agency's mission, vision, and employee efficacy (Meier, O'Toole, & Sean Nicholson-Crotty, 2004). Without this dual consideration, there is an inherent risk of focusing on issues and politics while failing to determine whether the elected leader's management maintains an agency that can functionally change them.

Study Rationale

A consideration central to this study was the employees' perception of the impact that elected leadership has on the structuring and managing of a state agency. A complexity within

understanding how elected officials' manage and successfully lead offices is exposure to the internal perceptions of these offices. Within an organizational context, Riketta (2002) defined employee buy-in, or attitudinal commitment, as an organizational member's emotional attachment to and identification with the organization. The managers of employees often create the foundation for employee buy-in, attitudes, and commitment through an exertion of influence (Certo, 2000; Kane-Urrabazo, 2006; Lyon & Ferrier, 2002; Meier et al., 2004; Riketta, 2002; Saari & Judge, 2004). This influence then creates an atmosphere that shapes employee feelings and actions (Lyon & Ferrier, 2002).

For newly elected leaders, this attitudinal carryover by employees from previous administrations poses a significant risk to the completion of campaign or mission promises. This is particularly true where the commitment was to the leader and not to the organization. Stephens, Dawley, and Stephens (2004) expanded this consideration to include the desire to take part in the activities of the organization. For example, if an employee cannot commit to the organization, the organization is at risk of not meeting the public service expectations of job performance. Therefore, this study sought to determine the employee perspective of whether and how transitions and varying management affects productivity.

When competing in elections, candidates are rarely asked questions that reveal their ability to manage people or an agency (Albritton, Oswald, & Anderson, 2008; Gardner, 2009). The act of selecting leaders includes the assumption that they can manage, yet how they will manage and engage the staff to meet the campaign promises lacks consideration (Kest, 2007; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Using employee perspectives, the current study attempted to clarify whether agency concern and employee attitudinal commitment were identifiable factors in how elected leaders manage and lead staff. In an organization in which change often means a new AG and administration every 2, 4, or 8 years, understanding how employees best respond to a new leader and the constant change in management style offers significant opportunity to avoid months or years of lost time by the leader (Daley & Lovrich, 2007; Ingraham, 2007; Kotter, 2007; Walker, 2005).

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the public sector employees' lived experiences and perceptions of the government sector management behaviors of elected leaders to better understand how elections and transitions may influence government agency progress. Specifically, this study explored employees' perceptions and lived experiences of various AGs' management strategies toward the agency mission and vision. The central research question guiding this study was "How do employees perceive the management skills of an elected leader?" Two supporting questions clarified the central question of the study: (a) Is there a difference in employee perceptions based on particular demographic variables (such as seniority, job title, or education level) of the interviewee? and (b) Is any particular management strategy seen as more prominently used than another?

Method

Participants

Participants were 10 current employees (6 women and 4 men) of varying roles (5 assistant attorneys general, 1 manager, 1 advocate, and 3 administrative assistants). Six had postgraduate degrees and the remaining four had a graduate degree or less. Participants were from AG offices in the West and Midwest regions of the United States. Each had varying experience with AG transitions where half possessed more than 7 years of experience and thus had seen numerous transitions, but all had experienced at least two AG transitions.

Instruments

Prior to data collection, a pilot study using phone interviews was conducted with two participants from an AG office known to the primary researcher to provide additional feedback on the interview questions and process. Two participants responded to questions relating to management including "Do you feel the election transitions and AG's management style and processes impacts the productivity of the office?" The participants offered general responses supporting an understanding, but had difficulty in clearly identifying specific management styles/terminology. Thus, questions relating to management styles and terms relating to management style were altered for improved clarity. The participants used anecdotes and paraphrasing to specify various management styles and willingly shared specific lived experiences. Subsequent questions provided greater discussion and detail with participants responding with varied experiences and adjectives supporting diversity within the questioning.

Following the pilot data review, the questions were enhanced to include specific sub-questions of the various levels of management to identify whether different management styles affected the administration's perceived management. The original interview questions, developed from the literature review and created by the researcher, included the following:

1. Do you feel you have a clear understanding of the current administration's management strategy of the agency/staff?
2. What have been successful/less-successful management skills observed/experienced during your time with the agency?
3. Briefly describe observations and experiences of AG transitions that you have witnessed.
4. Do your supervisor's duties change when there is a new AG elected?

The final interview guide included 12 primary open-ended questions targeting the perceptions of executive management, direct managers, and management. Semi-structured interviews supported participant interaction and focus on the

topic while offering a platform for discovery (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The scripted questioning focused on obtaining participant experiences with three management concepts, three questions on communication of leadership expectations, two regarding access to various levels of leadership and managers, and seven on the execution of expected protocols. A questionnaire for demographic data was included in the study, though interviews were the primary data source.

Procedure

Following Institutional Review Board approval, over a period of 2 months one-on-one phone interviews with the participants provided input toward clarifying concepts of management, leadership, and direct manager experience. To recruit participants for the full study, a NAAG representative provided a list of 43 popularly elected AGs and encouraged direct contact with the various offices. Direct requests for participation were mailed in two stages. Although the first round of requests received no agency participants, one AG returned a signed consent to use premises in the second round. The assistant to this AG was then contacted via telephone to arrange for an e-mailed letter requesting participation that also included an informed consent form to be sent to all staff. Following this e-mailed invitation, 10 employees from four offices provided consent and phone interviews were arranged based on their availability. Combined, they represented experiences from 13 total current and former AG administrations.

Phone interviews were arranged individually with each participant and occurred outside of working hours. Interviews were conducted via telephone and lasted approximately 90 min. All interviews were recorded as well as maintained with handwritten notes. At the end of each interview, data were transcribed and entered into NVivo 9® software. Essential to the process of qualitative research is maintaining the integrity of the data by providing participants' exact words for reliable themes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2009; Wolcott, 2008; Yin, 2003), though to maintain confidentiality, participants were not identified.

Questions were read to the participant and answers were voice-recorded with handwritten notes transcribed immediately following each interview by the primary researcher. Each interview followed the same line of questioning, though for a true reflection of the lived experience, follow-up questions were used to maintain clarity of the interviewees' perspectives. To ensure accuracy, all interviewees were allowed to review and authenticate the transcripts (Yin, 2003).

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity addresses the accuracy of results, where external validity relates to the discoveries being generalizable (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Wolcott, 2008). Validity and reliability management were supported with multiple data

sources (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2003). The researcher was a former first-line manager with direct experience in managing within an elected leader's office, which may have led to personal bias or opinions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The research design overcame this challenge to validity through careful documentation of only the feelings and perceptions the participants shared in the interviews. The research design included multiple data collection resources to corroborate discoveries as the study progressed (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2003).

In qualitative research, reliability depends on systematic protocol ensuring production of the same results by way of consistent procedures (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Corring & Cook, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Gerring, 2006; Silverman, 2009). The research design confined the study to performing semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees through the use of scripted questions. Each interview used identical questions and interviewees were permitted to review and authenticate the transcripts (Yin, 2003). The transcription was completed using NVivo 9® software.

Data Analysis

Data coding and organization occurred using conceptual themes and categories to align, compare, and define emerging patterns (Yin, 2003). NVivo 9® software provided content analysis for pattern and theme detection for the written data and was created particularly for qualitative data analysis to group variables and permit themes and interpretations.

All interview data were analyzed and grouped according to observed themes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Gerring, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2009). Sorting occurred by participant before a review of all transcripts generated a base level of comprehension and common themes (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The patterns and themes from the interviews were then compared for trends (Corring & Cook, 2007; Gerring, 2006; Silverman, 2009; Yin, 2003) relating to both the leadership's engagement with employees and management's direction within the current administration's tenure.

The use of the analysis software assisted in creating a thorough organization of themes, bringing shared experiences of the participants into greater focus (Creswell, 2005). The software coded, grouped, labeled, and organized raw data, which supported the discovery of common relationships and themes of participants' perceptions. Within the research, synthesis of these themes included various descriptions to ensure a clear perception of the collective participants' perceptions and observations (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Corring & Cook, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Wolcott, 2008).

Results

The analysis of the data uncovered four themes directly relating to the perception of elected leaders' management ability. Individual interview responses offered a variety of

subthemes including communication, awareness of the various roles, inconsistent management strategies, disconnect from the office beyond the role of the Assistant Attorney General (AAG), and difficulty in balancing the political demands with the personnel demands. However, the data fit into four themes of necessity: (a) consistent delivery of management, (b) consistent levels of communication, (c) stronger presence of the AG as leader/manager, and (d) removing stagnation of agency progress. Each is explained with supporting participant examples.

Theme 1: Consistent Delivery of Management

All participants described the executive office, including the AG, as macro management. Within this consideration, Participants (P) 2, 8, and 3, respectively, used phrases such as "management is minimal," "we are trusted to do our jobs," and "AG is a political figure, not a manager." At the middle manager level, or those tasked to support the administration's expectations, there is less consistency of a particular management style. P3, P6, and P10, respectively, used phrases including "luck of the draw if you get a micro or macro manager," "management disconnect," and "layers of management with all different expectations/styles." Identified by the majority of participants was the difficulty in supporting change when "no one is clear on why the management change occurred," as noted by P5.

Sought from P7 was a clear management strategy that was "initiated at the top and enforced consistently through the management to the subordinates." Three AAGs noted comparison of the management in private sector law firms where peers who advanced through the office manage attorneys. Participants viewed this advancement as a clear opportunity for managers to understand and appreciate the way the office runs. In the private sector, the perception noted by P1 was that "staff are allowed to do their work" with the understanding that "not all decisions need be vetted all the way to the top . . . management must trust."

Participants frequently noted the dual relationship of an AG being both manager/leader and political figure as the block to efficient and consistent management. P9 highlighted a perception of the AG viewing "management as being an afterthought and laborious" where the politics took center stage. This left the daily management to the various levels of managers who, particularly noted by the AAG participants, do not always have management training or extensive experience.

All participants referenced a disconnect among managers and their staff due to the agency size and vast array of job duties maintained by staff. "Each division has pockets of isolation," "administration has no idea the level of minutia the office handles every day," and "no way for the administration to manage since they can't know everything that everyone does" were common perceptions among participants, particularly among AAGs. A concern P4 noted about inconsistent management within this discussion was the

availability for staff to become "slackers who don't do their job since no one knows what they do." Two AAGs from different agencies noted that with changing administrations many AAGs can get "lost in the shuffle with the more obscure duties they hold, and being the 'experts' can thus get away with a lot." Specifically, an AAG stated, "I don't really see management . . . I mean I come in, work my cases, and discuss them with my direct supervisor, that's [sic] it."

Theme 2: Consistent Levels of Communication

Participants all commented on the varied approaches to communication used by management. The general perception was that while communication existed, what the staff sought and received was inconsistent. Often communication from the executive office was described as "limited" by P2, "lacking" by P7, and "irrelevant" by P8 and P3.

AAGs reported that limited communication was the biggest issue in completing their jobs. The immediate concern was the demand for communication flowing up the chain of command to occur quickly, but the seemingly acceptable delays by which communication came down the chain. Where a faster and clearer response was necessary, P10 noted the various levels of vetting delayed communication while also making "unnecessary or redundant" changes that "further confused" staff. Communication of management expectations and processes was also inconsistent per participant experiences. All non-AAG participants noted a lack of executive office communication that was relevant to their jobs and noted that it was "primarily information rather than directives."

All participants noted that communication is clear and strong in the first months of a transition or during an election year. However, outside of those timeframes communication disintegrates. P6 stated "Communication regarding management is filtered through middle management. What they don't want you to know, you don't know [*sic*]."

Participant 9 noted an unusual situation when one AG elected into office, "initially sent a memo highlighting his management and leadership ideology, then followed up with individual meetings with divisions to meet, greet, and further discuss his management expectations." While this was an exception to the responses, the participant noted that this gave employees a clear sense of what AG management expected, and thus they initially "felt more connected to his administration." Non-AAG participants all noted a differential treatment in which AAGs had more direct access to the executive team and AG due to the risk of cases that the AAGs took on; they might become media worthy or politically delicate.

Theme 3: Removing Stagnation of Agency Progress

Six participants noted the slow progress of the AGs administrative transitions as a contentious point. P1 described

progress as "slow to the point of going backwards." Many participants noted a lack of AG engagement, managerial flexibility, autonomy in decision making, and micromanagement as being deterrents to agency progress particularly as it negatively influenced morale. While participants accepted the stagnation is more about the managers than the AG, one concern heard repeatedly was the "need for the AG to know what is going on in the office, and be willing to ensure a smooth transition and adequate management."

P5 noted, "Where management needs to support, often it simply controls." An advocate voiced concern that with isolation comes stagnation. "Managers don't cross-train staff, so if someone retires/quits, their knowledge and experience is gone. The next person has to start from scratch . . . and this happens a lot." AAG participants described the difficulty for managers being able to terminate staff "for cause." The perception of P7 was that management had too much else to deal with "then to try to monitor and document the nonperforming staff," particularly those in siloed positions. Participants identified the concern that the nonperforming staff negatively affect morale, as those working hard see what is happening. According to P3, "staff that should be let go are often not and others have to pick up the slack."

Theme 4: Stronger Presence of the AG as Leader/Manager

Consistently noted within participant transcripts was the desire to have an AG who was a "strong manager," "good leader," "legal expert," and "politically savvy." Participants noted a desire for an AG to possess political experience, but none admitted to particularly seeking one with governmental experience. Both an AAG and manager (MNG) wished for an AG who had started as an AAG, and thus would "have the knowledge of the office prior to running it." Again, the comparison was with the private sector law firms, where P8 noted a desire for an AG with "litigation experience but also the experience of managing lawyers." Missing from the responses was a discussion of the necessity of government experience.

Transitions of administrations were the most significant focus for responses of how an AG, as manager, should engage staff and demonstrate a presence as leader/manager. Noted consistently by participants was the wish for AGs to engage with the various divisions rather than "staying hidden" during the first months of a transition. For example, P4 observed that the best way to learn the agency is by "full immersion into the agency . . . find out who we are and what we can do for your term(s)." Only three participants (P3, P7, and P10) could recall a full agency meeting where the AG spoke to the collective other than for annual holiday parties. Every participant supported full agency meetings as a significant way to establish a clear message of leadership. P6 explained that the difficulty with this is the "varied pockets of focus within the agency . . . not every department really

cares what others do, so a meeting of the whole agency must be general enough in its focus."

Six participants sought a clear discussion of the AGs management style and strategic vision for their tenure in office. Where a few AGs were noted as having done this when they entered office, most did not. P9 explained that with three different AGs "never did we get a sense of who they were as leaders or managers, upon them taking office." Even those who did, failed to maintain the enforcement of the communicated styles and vision, as was the case noted by P9. Only three AGs were noted as having communicated regularly with staff through emails. Most participants noted getting communication from the executive office, but not directly from the AG regarding how the office was doing or where it was headed. P7 noted the executive office emails were "typically reminders of upcoming events or AG press releases."

Discussion

This study sought to determine the difficulty by which employees of elected AGs perceive and perform to consistently changing management and agendas as new administrations cycle in and out after elections. As the data from the current study demonstrate, participants communicated a disconnect from the management of the elected official. For a leader to be elected and accountable to the staff to lead, the effectiveness of particular styles of leadership and management depends on the middle management processes and the general efficacy of the staff selected by the elected official (Hollander et al., 1977; Kelman, 2005; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; OPM, 2001). The larger implications dictate a need for a clearer understanding of the key leadership and management models most successful in the public sector, which should be considered separately from general comparisons with the private sector's practices.

Perhaps most important and lacking from the research was the still unanswered question of whether elections are the most appropriate method of selecting leaders for agencies such as the AG. Government organizations are accountable to the public for upholding any number of responsibilities and expectations. Thus, they need leaders with management capabilities at the ready (Bertucci, 2006; Brewer & Walker, 2010; Demir & Nyhan, 2008; Goldberg & Haugen, 2008; Kest, 2007; Lemay, 2009; Menzel & White, 2011). Findings support the necessity for more complete and detailed research of public sector leadership selection best practices to ensure that elected leaders are innovative in engaging employees for optimal productivity.

Data from the current research noted that often, aside from the act of transitioning to a new administration, little was accomplished to effectively change agency practices or structure relating to management. Furthermore, it was apparent that newly elected leaders were not actively making changes but focused on maintaining status quo. Regardless of how specialized the practice of law or specific the duties,

all staff need consistent and present management to support progress (Daley & Lovrich, 2007; Holmer, 1968; Ingraham, 2007; Kelman, 2005; McCann et al., 2004; OPM, 2001). While leadership may be temporary, the employees and duties of the agency are much more permanent. Therefore, participants wished for leadership willing to help improve what will remain after they depart.

Recommendations

The current research suggests that offices with popularly elected leaders may increase staff performance and improve agency processes by conducting discussions with staff during election transitions and early in the new tenure. Government organizations may improve managerial consistency with the leader directly and regularly addressing the agency. Even meetings per division may provide a clearer understanding of the management direction, focus, and vision for the agency. This address should include a clear communication of what is expected of the middle manager roles as well as the support staff.

Increased direct staff communication that is separate from press releases as well as performance plans, meeting minutes, and general reports of the progress of cases or actions the agency is taking would provide staff with a sense of connectivity to the executive office. This communication would demonstrate a clearer understanding of the elected leader's intent and leadership direction. Communication should also be clarified and consistent among the management team so that a constant message is shared throughout the agency rather than managers' cherry picking the information they deem most relevant for their team.

The executive leadership team, with support of the elected leader, might consider the implementation and follow-through of a management training program for all managers as well as those possibly on track to become managers. Such a program could support the various themes noted within the current study including consistent management implementation, communication, employee performance, and morale. Providing managers with the elected leader's expectations as well as how public sector agencies differ from the private sector could more meaningfully support the duties of the staff and potentially increase productivity of the agency.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study had a number of limitations which should be clarified. Participation was low, partly because many agencies cited budgetary constraints and staff shortages for reasons not to participate. A number of potential participants demonstrated interest in the study but simply could not coordinate a time to complete the interview due to scheduling conflicts.

The role each participant maintained at the agency was another limitation, as each role may provide experiences and perceptions that differed. The demographics of a sample population, particularly if lacking in diverse representation, can skew findings. This is particularly a risked limitation if the research focuses on demographics of party affiliation. Whereas this study offered diversity in participant roles, a larger number of participants or the addition of more offices could clarify results.

Such limitations provide avenues for future research. Specifically, future research should encompass a broader scope of popularly elected offices to replicate the study. Continuing research should also focus on executive and middle manager participants in particular, as the current study did not obtain a fully diversified population sample. Whole office participation may offer a more detailed comparison of coworker perceptions.

An additional area of future study should investigate those selected by alternative methods. While the current study focused on popularly elected offices as a first step, gaining an understanding of the alternate selection processes will be important to grasp better the phenomenon. Then, a comparative study of elected and non-elected AGs' management ability could be conducted.

The current study included qualitative research methods which risk both participant and researcher bias in the discussion and interpretation of the data. Thus, future research should consider duplication of methodology as well and incorporating other research methods including quantitative and mixed methods.

Research has identified the various effects management and leadership styles imposed on both public and private sector agencies (Buchen, 2005; Drucker, 1997; Greenberg, Baron, Sales, & Owens, 2000; Ingraham, 2007; Lyon & Ferrier, 2002; Menzel & White, 2011; Mintzberg, 1979; Pijl & Sminia, 2004; Thomson, 2010). Missing from the data, and that the current study supports as necessary, is research directed toward determining the relationship between elected leadership, various management and leadership strategies, and the response from staff.

Conclusion

Popular elections focus on the political expertise of an individual rather than the specific leadership or management style of that person (Fitzpatrick, 2008). In situations in which the elected individual also manages an office, staff often face lengthy transition periods of uncertainty and limited management guidance from the elected leader (Kapeliush, 1978; Walker, 2005). Within the uncertainty and varied management strategies, career employees are tasked with upholding the duties of the agency while representing the elected leader's goals and mission. In an environment of negative public perception toward government employee performance, elected leaders face the challenge of leading staff, managing progress, and building a platform to support personal political aspirations (Brewer & Walker, 2010; Choi et al., 2008;

Menzel & White, 2011; OPM, 2001; Tripathi & Dixon, 2008). However, if popularly elected leaders do not bring to an agency a clear management strategy and a willingness to understand the nuanced roles within the office, the risk is a staff managed inconsistently, leading to a further obfuscation of the agency's goals and progress.

Public sector agencies benefit from leadership that provides a clear management direction, with middle managers consistent and in concert with the leader's intended agency mission (Cook, 1998; Cordero Nieves, 2005; Daley & Lovrich, 2007; Fabian, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2000; Nair, 2009; Walker, 2005; Yahong & Feiock, 2010). In determining leadership in the public sector, the ability to support management and ensure training opportunities to enhance management and leadership within the organization is imperative.

The current study provided participant perceptions that revealed the varied and often inconsistent experiences with management in a popularly elected government office. Data suggest that career employees, while understanding the dual nature of the AG position, seek to have an elected leader with a strong management background who clearly knows both the law and government processes. AAGs in particular seek autonomy to complete their duties, while other job roles seek consistent management in which communication flows quickly in both directions. Communication, consistency, and strong management of the leader were the over-arching themes noted.

These findings support the research of others that suggest a need for more specific research on the elected leader management phenomenon (Albritton et al., 2008; Choi et al., 2008; Fabian, 2010; Kelman, 2005; Menzel & White, 2011; Tucci, 2008). Public sector agencies led by elected officials may create an infrastructure of management that better supports the transition of new leadership. Such an infrastructure requires a focus on increasing and improving communication among staff, creating a sense of consistency through inclusion of the collective team rather than silos, and middle management to support the initiatives of the agency mission. Consideration of the most effective method for selecting leaders in the public sector should include the management ability of the individual in addition to the particular duties required of the position, as in this case, litigation and legal interpretation.

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