11 Doing Democratic Public Administration

TIPS FOR ANALYZINH ORGANIZATIONAL CASE STUDIES

This exercise gives you a chance to apply the readings and knowledge you have gained this far in analyzing a case study. Three very different cases posted on Moodle provide scenarios for doing this. Readings in Denhardt and Fry and Raadschelders provide content about different ways of understanding organizations. Working cases in class provides additional analytical skills. Now you can combine the two areas of experience in written form as you analyze on e of the three cases for this assignment. Figure 10-1 (after p. 355) in Fry and Raadschelders gives you a good graphic presentation of the kinds of components studied by scholars and practitioners as ways of understanding and explaining how organizations work. It is helpful in identifying what components might be operating in the case that you chose, and what components might not be present or relevant to analyzing what is going on. For example, is it a problem involving a decision—or cooperation-- or policy complexity/political ecology or leadership?

It is useful to FRAME a problem to get at the most important factors the drive the issue and lead to understanding and even ways to resolve problems. Some problems are more political in nature, others may involve bureaucratic authority or human resource issues. Some may feature leadership as a key factor, while others may be more relevant to symbolism. Some useful frames for analyzing organizations are:

1. Structural Frame. How are structures arranged in the case? Structures include all sorts of institutions—laws, the structures of public organizations, private or nonprofit organizations, bureaucratic structures and the location of authority. Recommendations might include changing these components and re-engineering organizations and organizational design. Problems can also occur when a lack of structures creates a vacuum where no agreed-on method for getting to solutions exists.
2. Political Frame. The external political frame leads to thinking about how coalitions, power and conflict occur between different organizations. This is a kind of political ecology analysis. In this frame, leaders often become more like politicians than managers.
Another perspective within this frame includes the internal politics within an organization---sometimes called bureaucratic politics. How do coalitions within the organization work to affect outcomes? Inside the organization itself, political arenas may develop and some people may act as political agents.
3. Symbolic Frame. Organizations have their own “cultures” with rituals and symbols. Logos, badges and other visual presentations represent shared ideas and missions. Rituals can include established meetings, special roles and privileges attached to positions, and some activities that repeat themselves almost like a play in the theatre. Symbols and culture build over time and often change more slowly than other organizational components. They can be part of informal organizations based on habit or shared beliefs as well as the formal organization expressed in an organizational chart.
4. Human Resource Frame. This frame looks at the issues from a human resources management perspective. Traditionally this perspective focuses on people’s skills, attitudes, energy and commitment as vital resources that can make or break an organization. Employees may want to be more productive, but human resource systems of rewards, incentives, and disciplinary actions may actually work against the goals. Human resource systems in organizations can humiliate and frustrate the best of people or they can motivate them. Newer and sometimes radical ideas like non-hierarchical communication of good and bad news, team incentives, self-managing teams and peer-controlled pay systems can help make change.
5. Leadership Practice. Though earlier thinking framed leadership as a highly individualized issue, today leadership may be thought of as the empowerment of the people within an organization as well as the personal characteristics of a leader. Today, issues of training, adapting to change, negotiating, grievance practices, ethics, artistry and spirit are parts of leadership that extend beyond the usual characteristics of a skilled manger that have always included planning, organizing and implementing programs.

You can select any one of these frames that helps to highlight the major problems and issues present in the case that you selected. You may find that you want to develop your own frame or perspective and combine it with one of these frames or use it alone. Sometimes there are connections between frames, but two frames should be the maximum.

Got questions? Feel free to email us. Though class hasn’t started yet, we know that many of you are beginning to work on your assignments.