

# Leadership of public bureaucracies flashcard



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The Administrator as Conservator November 3, 2010 In Leadership of Public Bureaucracies - The Administrator as Conservator, Larry D. Terry explores public administration from a relatively new perspective, that of Bureaucratic Leadership, which he describes as historically neglected by scholars.

Bureaucratic leadership, according to Terry, is "...institutional leadership in the administration of public bureaucracies within the executive branch of all levels of government" (p.

4). Terry goes on to discuss the important role bureaucratic leaders play in public administration. Terry's first chapter looks at the reasons why the subject of bureaucratic leadership has not received the attention he believes it deserves. He blames this on: the fear of bureaucratic power that has developed over the years; the progressive legacy that has attempted to reform government by making it less bureaucratic and more businesslike; the influence of the scientific management movement which focused on methods versus leaders; and the ongoing efforts by scholars to use the hierarchy approach to address the politics/administration dichotomy. Chapter 1 also establishes a normative role for leaders of public bureaucracies.

The key concept of the leadership role of the administrator is his function as "conservator." Terry advanced the idea that "...administrative conservatorship is the willingness of administrative elites, out of traditional loyalty and moral principles, to preserve authority and distribution of power with regard to the propriety of an institution's existence, its functional niche, and its collective institutional goals...the preservation of institutional integrity" (p. 5). He dissects and defines this statement within his concept of

administrative conservatorship. For Terry's concept, institution must be differentiated from and not confused with organization. He draws from the works of Selznick and Scott to derive his definition of an institution as "...a creation of social needs and aspirations; it is an adaptive, responsive, cooperative system that embodies cultural values.

The cultural values and moral commitments of a society are implanted in its institutions. " Broadly, administrative elites are seen as "...those individuals or groups who are responsible for the promotion and conservation of social values..." In the context of administrative conservatorship, Terry defines them as "...public officials who are neither elected nor politically appointed but who hold administrative positions by virtue of a merit system. He views institutional integrity, in the context of administrative conservatorship, as "...the completeness, wholeness, soundness, and persistence of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures that provide meaning and stability to social behavior..." as well as "...the strength of administrative process, value commitments, and unifying principles that determine an institution's distinctive competence" (p. 27). This concept is further advanced in Chapter 2.

Terry argues that preservation of institutional integrity requires both autonomy and responsiveness. Autonomy is crucial for leaders to respond to threats that could undermine organizational integrity. Terry uses the example of The Federal Reserve to demonstrate. The Fed's non-reliance on Congress for funding insulates it from political pressure and allows it to carry out its functions relatively autonomously (pp. 50-51).

However, leaders must also simultaneously adapt and respond to ensure that their organizations maintain their integrity. In the case of the Fed, its leaders reaching out to the president, the Congress, etc. demonstrates its ability to adapt and respond to outside pressures. As this discussion demonstrates, the administrative conservator must fulfill many roles to preserve institutional integrity.

Terry groups these roles into three primary functions: conserving values, conserving mission and conserving support. I believe Terry's first two chapters are informative and enlightening. I agree that the importance of bureaucratic leadership has been overlooked in the literature of the past several decades. I also feel Terry does a nice job of using real world examples that the reader can understand.

Critically speaking, I think Terry is too limiting in his definition of administrative conservator exclusively as "public officials who are neither elected nor politically appointed but who hold administrative positions by virtue of a merit system." I believe that elected officials as well as appointees can and do serve as conservators. In fact, I believe they are often the guardians of institutional integrity. I admit that my opinion is largely affected by my own personal experience as an appointed public official.

Nonetheless, I feel Terry shortchanges those elected and appointed individuals that take their calling to serve and preserve very seriously. Chapters 3 through 5 develop arguments about how the role of administrator as conservator should be enacted and what leaders should seek to do in this role. Chapter 3 attempts to harness the massive role and responsibility of

the administrator with respect to conserving organizational mission. Terry centers his discussion around the authority of the institution and its leaders.

He explores the administrator's daunting task of interpreting and upholding the mission in both the "spirit and letter of the law" by using pivotal examples in recent history of public organizations violating such laws including the IRS' seizure of bank accounts for back taxes (p. 79) and Colonel Oliver North's actions in the Iran Contra scandal (pp. 82-83), respectively. He goes on to provide strategies that administrators use to ensure that the authoritative mission is maintained and ends the chapter with a list of violations that the administrative conservator must be aware of. Chapter 4 addresses the task of conserving organizational values by focusing exclusively on building and maintaining an executive cadre that helps the administrator protect the organization's core values.

Terry relies heavily upon the works of Barnard, Wilkens, Carnavale and Wechsler, and Wamsley and Zald to explain his support for the executive cadre approach to preserving values. He reviews the strategies of inducements (Barnard), minimizing dissension (Wilkens), building trust (Carnavale and Wechsler), and diversity (Wamsley and Zald). Chapter 5 focuses on preserving internal and external support for the organization. Terry accurately emphasizes the importance of maintaining the support of key stakeholders in and around and organization.

He again draws upon the works of others to describe strategies (complying with established standards, maintaining accurate indirect indexes of quality, cooptation, etc. ) to successfully garner and maintain support. I found Terry's

chapters on conserving values, mission and support to be lacking in theory. Rather, the book turns into a “ how-to” manual for executive leadership.

His introduction of strategies doesn't fit the overall concept he's trying to advance. I was left wanting a clearer explanation of the concepts related to conserving mission and support. I felt the chapter on conserving values was completely off the mark. Terry's definition of values, “ objects of desire that are capable of sustaining group identity...including any set of goals or standards that can form the basis of shared perspective and group feelings” (p. 08), is not what I consider to be an organization's values.

To me, the values of an organization are the acceptable standards which govern the work actions of individuals within the organization. Those standards must be defined, promoted and conserved by the leadership of the organization. Terry goes on to contradict himself by expanding the administrator conservator role into an “ executive cadre” whereby several leaders are responsible for this task. While I believe that this is absolutely true in the real world and Terry is correct, he appears to be reaching for answers. It's obvious that leadership, perhaps in the form of an “ executive cadre”, is responsible for promoting and conserving mission as well as support yet Terry doesn't rely on this during those discussions. Overall, I just felt that this was by far his weakest chapter.

On the other hand, I did appreciate the use of many empirical examples to illustrate his concepts and principles. Chapter 6 is a thoughtful conclusion that summarizes his key points and discusses potential pitfalls with his concept of leadership. He points out that “ ...administrative conservatorship

is a form of statesmanship. It requires professional expertise, political skill and a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be an active participant in governance” (p. 159).

Overall, I enjoyed and learned from Terry’s work. While I have been critical of the reading’s weak middle chapters, I feel his concept of administrative conservatorship is groundbreaking and crucial to moving the discussion of public bureaucracies forward. While Terry’s work was an excellent start, it explored but a fraction of this field. I would like to see Terry’s key concept expanded upon.

This to me would make this reading even more valuable.