

PRIVATE SECTOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS

by

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BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Private Sector Public Administrators is a three part, local and personal view of trends regarding the availability of professional public administrators and the sources for candidates to fill the demand for public administrators. The work will also touch on the requirements for potential future public administrator leadership and the sources from where future candidates for the field are found.

The author of *Private Sector Public Administrators* might be considered a non-traditional student of public administration having worked in the private sector and served as a locally elected official while pursuing a master's degree in public administration, to make an eventual career change to public administration. The definition of *traditional* as we learn in this work could be debated. The author defines the traditional path as a public sector employee who (1) has had an early realization to a career in executive level public administration which (2) is supported by graduate level education, specifically a master's degree in public administration.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Private Sector Public Administrators will discuss three items felt to be relevant to the topic of public administrator availability, sourcing, and preparation. Since having first expressed an interest in pursuing a career in public administration, the city administrator in our community shared with me his belief that the pool of qualified professionals for leadership roles in public administration was declining. Later as a graduate student at University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, first-hand observations lead me to believe that the number of fellow students who were actively working in the field was relatively low. Perhaps two or three students per class were in the field of municipal public administration. Other students were in the fields of social work, protective services, or healthcare. I questioned if the availability of qualified candidates for the public administration field was really declining and if so, why a greater percentage of my fellow graduate students were not working to fill the pipeline. Therefore *Private Sector Public Administrators* will attempt to explore the following items:

1. Current trends in the field of public administration as they pertain to the availability of future candidates to lead municipal government whether they are at the village, city, or county level.
 - a. We will try to confirm or deny trends in the availability of professional public administrators. The author will frame the trend at the municipal public administration level by first discussing the overall trend in employment in the

United States and then the trend in the public sector employment before focusing in on professional public administrators.

- b. The author will also highlight organizational tactics that might be utilized to prepare for or counteract the employment trends.
2. Identify through personal interviews of eight current public administrators or other professionals in the field of public administration in a focus group format what level of activity current public administrators perform to help fill the ranks of future public administrators.
 - a. Of particular interest will be whether or not candidates from the private sector or elected offices are considered *target candidates* for a career in public administration.
 - b. Consider the criteria (i.e. education, experience, skills, and desire) for what is believed to be required to be a successful public administrator, and to apply those criteria to possible professional positions within the private and public sectors for consideration of being candidates for public administrators.
 3. Finally, *Private Sector Public Administrators* will present ideas regarding the concept of targeting candidates within the private sector for careers in public administration for further consideration. This may be for the benefit of institutions of higher education such as UW-Oshkosh and public administration professional organizations such as International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The concept of targeting private sector professionals for employment within the public sector is really a consideration of the entire labor pool in light of the events we are currently experiencing, namely large numbers of retiring baby-boomers. Based on conversations with interactions with a working city administrator and fellow students in the master's of public administration graduate program, the author believes there is a decreasing number of qualified candidates for executive level leadership roles.

The bigger picture and according to the Pew Research Center in 2010, roughly 10,000 Baby Boomers will turn 65 every day for the next 19 years (Fox, 2004). As you will read later in *Private Sector Public Administrators*, the reality of retiring baby-boomers impacts the field of public administration. You will also read that the concept of filling the pipeline of professional public administrators with anyone other than individuals already working in the public sector is an area of discourse which appears to have not been widely considered. The majority of the focus group participants, however, share diverse and non-traditional paths to a career in public administration. Survey questions used for the focus group specifically asking if and how many individuals from both the private sector and elected officials were directly or indirectly encouraged to pursue a career in public administration were often not answered. This failure to answer the question lead the author to believe that the working public administration professionals in the focus group either did not understand the concept or, more likely, do

not consider the private sector as a source for future public administrators; in other words, irrelevant.

The survey results showed how the respondents tended to agree that there is no ideal background for candidates in careers within public administration and that there is no single path to a career in public administration. Only one respondent could be termed as having a strong opinion that public sector employees with backgrounds in finance, planning, or economic development are preferred sources for public administrators. Outside of the focus group used for *Private Sector Public Administrators*, professional writings and other resources on the topic are limited. Therefore the author was required to place more emphasis on the results of the focus group survey, as well as less in-depth writings such as trade publications or magazine articles.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Private Sector Public Administrators may provide insight to possible new sources of future public administrators. If it is expected that trend in available, qualified candidates for leadership roles in municipal public administration will continue to decline and that as a response to the decline current public administrators will be expected to assist to fill the ranks of future public administrators, the survey results indicate that current professional public administrators simply do not consider individuals outside of the public sector as target candidates and that greater efforts to recruit such candidates may be needed.

Educational institutions offering graduate level educations in public administration may also wish to reach out to individuals preparing for a career in the private sector while those students are studying at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate students without a clear plan who may find themselves to be better suited to serve in a public sector leadership role could be made better aware of the opportunities in the public sector by the very educators of public administration. As you will read later in the focus groups summary comments, several of the focus group respondents commented that if offered a ‘do-over’ they would have come to the realization of a career in public administration sooner and worked to obtain a master’s degree in public administration earlier in their careers.

Similarly professional organizations such as ICMA with a mission to serve the field of public administration may wish to conduct further study on the concept of

targeting private sector individuals in order to more effectively dedicate resources to pursue such candidates. Trade publications will not reach outside the boundaries of the public administrator's office if only member public administrators are on the mailing list.

At a minimum the questions posed in the *Private Sector Public Administrators* is a wakeup call of sorts. According to the responses to survey questions inquiring how respondents prefer to approach candidates for consideration in the field of public administration, I found that approximately one half of the respondents did not consider it their responsibility to actively find qualified candidates. Although not specifically asked in the survey if the respondent was a member of a professional organization, the author was somewhat disheartened to learn indirectly through the answers of the respondents that some individuals were not members of a professional organization such as ICMA. ICMA, as mentioned earlier, spends much time to develop current public administrators. In short, a more concerted effort to fill the pipeline of candidates for a career in public administration can be made by working (and recently retired, for that matter) public sector professionals at multiple levels in order to promote careers in public administration.

Steve Jobs once asked his employees, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" I view the opportunity for public administrators to accept the challenge to personally attract quality people to the field of public administration as a chance to change the world.

INTRODUCTION

B. Guy Peters wrote in *The Future of Governing*, “Contemporary public servants are neither martyrs or saints; they are simply individuals charged with making collective decisions and enforcing previous decisions on the behalf of the public interest” (2009, pg 3). A rather broad view which leaves the reader to believe that most anyone with an interest in serving the public might be invited to do so, assuming the proper skill set and education has been obtained.

Perhaps this is a good point in time to share with the reader my background so as to disclose any personal bias or provide a better understanding for the reason for *Private Sector Public Administrators*. My undergraduate studies were interrupted with a three year enlistment in the military, and spent all but a few months living in West Germany. I returned to the United States to complete my studies. I obtained a baccalaureate degree in business administration with an emphasis in strategic marketing. So that I could do more than order a “bier” or ask for directions home, I also decided to minor in German with the goal of one day returning to former East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, spring of 1990. Available housing in the newly unified Germany (primarily West Germany) and the inability to secure a work permit to transfer to former East Germany influenced any long-term plans to stay in Germany. I returned to the United States feeling somewhat of a failure for having not lived up to my dream of blazing a new path in Eastern Europe. With a business degree in hand I worked in the private sector and

accepted a position with a multinational firm, working in the international business division.

My basic appreciation of public service was rooted to my military enlistment. My interest in public service peaked while observing the publically televised debate regarding a proposed expansion of economic development boundaries into a historic residential neighborhood in our community. I offered to help the residents of that neighborhood, who unfortunately had already been coerced into selling their homes or face eviction through eminent domain. I became involved by attending meetings, circulating petitions, and presenting the findings to the Common Council. I was eventually persuaded to put my ideals to use by representing a 2,000 person constituency and run for a seat on the 10-person Common Council, which I did.

Three years into my service as alderperson my pattern of discovery took me a step further while I and my colleagues muddled through the same economic development venture that peaked my interest. We worked with the same city administrator who was leading the way. Collectively we botched five potential developments, successfully divided our community on the issue, and managed to create a reputation of being unfriendly to developers. Having sat through many long meetings and closed sessions, I recalled thinking, "Working with interested developers and completing this project should not be that difficult. I think I can do better." I perceived what I thought was a void in the skill set of our city administrator. His was a background of decades of public sector employment, with a foundation in accounting. I greatly admired and respected him, but I also saw the opportunity to develop a greater synergy between protecting the

interests of the public sector with the demand from the private sector in communities like ours.

Serving as a local elected official while working in the private sector I learned to better appreciate the interests of both public and private sectors. During the economic recession that began in 2008 I also witnessed the often callous personnel management tactics and uncertain leadership skills of my employer. Realizing the desire to take a more active role in public sector administration and being slightly disillusioned with private sector leadership, I decided to prepare for a career change to begin by seeking a master's degree in public administration.

Despite several recommendations to “just take a class or two” and then apply for a position as a village administrator because my “time as an elected official would fulfill the remaining requirements,” I did not feel my base of education and experience were adequate to enter the field of public administration. I felt compelled to complete a master's degree in public administration. Fully realizing my strengths and weaknesses as what I viewed as a non-traditional student I began my journey. I viewed my path to a career in public administration as anything but the ideal path. I thought the path to a career in public sector management required a person to have entered work in the public sector at a young age, progress through ranks, and then develop further through higher education opportunities. That was my path and hence an interest in creating *Private Sector Public Administrators*.

“Change in the public sector is the rule rather than the exception. The quest for the perfect way of structuring and managing government has gone on as long as there has

been a government, always to be met with disappointment. The problem has been in part that there is no single definition of what constitutes perfect administration (Peters, 1996, pg. ix).” The statement summarized that the job of public administrators is one of continued *reforming and improving*. Taken at face value one might believe that the role of the modern Public Administrator, that is, municipal managers at all levels working within their various reporting structures or forms of governance, is a role anyone with an interest in public service could fill. If true then I asked myself the following questions:

1. How self-sustainable is the field of public administration?
2. How large is the pool of potential, qualified candidates?
3. From where do these candidates come?
4. What are the ideal backgrounds and career paths?
5. What strategies are required to locate and develop qualified individuals?

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP

As previously mentioned, roughly 10,000 Baby Boomers will turn 65 every day for the next 19 years. The *Silver Tsunami*, a term coined by the Pew Research Center over ten years ago, was used to alert our society of the sharp increase in retirements (Fox, 1998). Similar to a tidal wave, the number of retirements due to the average age of public sector managers, the *baby-boomer generation*, would create an enormous shortage of public sector leaders. The dilemma has impact on many sectors of professional executives so our focus will be on public sector executives.

A decade later The Center for State & Local Government Excellence published survey findings in *The Tidal Wave Postponed* (2009). The Center conducted an electronic survey of 5,125 members of International Public Management Associated for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) and the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE) in April 2009. Four hundred sixty members took part in the survey. The NASPE survey attempted to learn what percentage of employees were eligible for retirement in the next five years, and what impact the slumping economy at that time might have upon their plans to retire. The Center learned that 67.3 percent of the employees surveyed were eligible for retirement in five years; however, the slumping economy was reported to have delayed the planned retirements by 84.5 percent of those eligible. If there was a single event to prevent the Silver Tsunami from hitting the United States it was a bad economy, fortunately for the field of public administration.

The Center went on to survey respondents about their organization's level of preparedness for the eventual loss of leadership in the public sector and how their organization would ride out the economic recession. Only 38.5 percent of the respondents said they actually had a workforce development plan in place. The study pointed out that concepts of workforce planning were clearly in need of development and implementation. To be revealed later in the *Private Sector Public Administrators* the lack of preparedness for the declining rolls will become evident as well. Meanwhile layoffs were to occur in 60.2 percent of the government organizations, usually based on seniority and other factors such as importance to the organization.

Was the public sector ready for a change in workforce numbers due to the inevitable retirement of their executive leaders was a question that remained to be answered. Thomas Tierney of the Stanford School of Business published *The Leadership Deficit*, a study focused on executive level leadership in non-private sectors (2006). Tierney wrote, "Over the next decade nonprofits will need to find some 640,000 new executives, nearly two and a half times the number currently employed" (2006, pg 28). To meet the growing demand for talent, the author of the study offered creative ways of finding and recruiting new leaders from a wide range of groups, including businesses, the military, and the growing pool of retirees. Tierney hinted of possible new sources of executive level talent from within the private sector which may also benefit the area of municipal public administration.

Daring to Lead 2011: A National Study of Non-profit Executive Leadership (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011), a joint project of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services

and the Meyer Foundation, questioned the sustainability of organizations' leadership ranks. Among the key findings of the study was the fact that Boards of Directors were not prepared for the 67 percent of the executive level leadership that would be leaving in five years. Soon-to-be retirees were the individuals who in large part were the same professionals of the Silver Tsunami mentioned earlier but who opted to postpone their retirements.

Daring to Lead 2011 created three vital calls to action for the public sector (Cornelius et al, 2011).

1. Plan for successful transitions by creating succession plans.
2. Work for sustainability within your organization or field.
3. Expand and diversify development options available to executive directors.

The idea of municipal government having not been prepared for the large number of retirees after the recession was reiterated by Brian Peteritas in *Government Unprepared for Boomers' Mass Exodus* (2012, pg 3). Peteritas stated that the potential impact of the approaching retirement of baby boomers was reduced due to the recession. Meanwhile the workforce of those over 55 years of age rose by 7.6 percent as those under age 25 dropped by 13.2 percent. He went on to report that the public sector was "remarkably ill-prepared for the impending turnover in the workforce" (2012, pg 3).

Peteritas told of organizations fighting to sustain their ranks through such concepts as the *expert interview*, whereby senior leaders planning to retire are interviewed by human resource professionals and managers much like is done during standard employee exit interviews (2012). The process of conducting pre-exit interviews

helped organizations identify the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain their leadership ranks. The organization then began to adopt *knowledge transfer* and *succession planning* to develop a roadmap for their future leadership.

Peteritas summarized the dire situation as one of keeping the current workforce engaged in their jobs while preparing them for advancement. “What is certain is that (the employment ranks of) millennials will jump to 75 percent of the workforce by 2025. With that in mind, states and localities need to focus on attracting younger employees and training know-how to manage and lead” (2012, pg 4).

A more recent work by the Advisory Board on Graduate Education – ICMA, summarized that the pipeline of skilled, experienced professionals had *slowed to a drip*. “In one city manager search I’m doing right now...I only have seven qualified candidates. Fifteen years ago, it would have been twenty great candidates” (2013, pg 2) reported Dr. Karl Nollenberger, who also works as a consultant. ICMA leadership was forced to ask themselves, “How does ICMA convince talented public servants to consider a career path that includes a manager position?” (2013, pg 2)

Although seven recommendations were provided by the ICMA Advisory Board of Graduate Education for filling the local government pipeline of candidates from academic and working professionals in the field, the list did not mention the possibility of seeking candidates from the private sector. The list of recommendations (2013):

1. Facilitate more long-term fellowship positions throughout the country where a new graduate could become immersed within a city/county.

2. Develop a mentor program between veteran (or retired) managers and potential city/county managers to assist with advice and the job hunt.
3. Explore the potential for reaching out to undergraduate programs or high schools.
4. Encourage local government professionals in non-generalist positions to join ICMA and consider offering joint memberships with other professional organizations in fields such as Public Finance, Human Resources, Public Works, and Planning associations.
5. Promote the importance of Analysts and Assistant positions for effective city management and competitively compensate them.
6. Advocate for MPA curriculum that prepares students for generalist city management positions as well as specialized entry level positions in local government.
7. Ensure MPA programs and ICMA are on the same page in terms of recognizing new careers path to city management if current trends continue.

Although the ICMA recommendations listed effective ways to identify and develop candidates from an existing pipeline of candidates, albeit a slow drip for flow, the list did not look outside the field to the private sector for potential candidates.

ICMA is not alone in what appears to be an inability or unwillingness to look outside normal sources for new executive level leadership. Daniel Luzer in a recent issue of *Governing: Smart Management* wrote in an article “Ideas for Coping with Brain Drain in the Public Sector” (2013) “governments facing the wave of retirements must look for

new ways to build knowledge and expertise of people coming up in the organization. One should not turn a blind eye to the need of finding and preparing the next generation of leaders or risk disaster within their organization” (2013). Luzer stressed that *knowledge transfer* is not something that should be done in reaction to a retirement announcement but rather knowledge transfer should be a part of the organization’s culture. He went on to encourage such programs as *internal sabbaticals* that are designed to give a professional the opportunity to work in a temporary position in order to experience a different role and learn the required skills from that person’s normal job. *Talent exchange programs* are designed to allow employees of one community to work in a slightly different position of another community in what was referred to as a “stretch position” for up to three months. A budget analyst, for example, might change positions with a management analyst or community relations specialist. *Management fellowship or internship programs* also help prepare future city managers. ICMA, for example, encourages municipalities to offer one-year internship programs to provide diverse, on-the-job training for future public administrators. *Phased retirement* is a process used in Minnesota since 2009 which authorizes retirees the ability to wind down their work slowly rather than all at once.

I submit that in the face of overall trend of mass retirements in our society, public organizations will be faced with ever increasing competitive situations for qualified leadership. They must search for future leaders from all possible sources, not simply from within the ranks of the public sector.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY

The informal survey of public sector professionals, which I refer to as my focus group, was designed to do three things.

1. I wanted to learn the education and career backgrounds of the survey participant. This would help me identify potential personal biases to the subsequent sections of the survey, as well as determine the degree to which respondents followed what I believed to be a traditional path to become a public administrator.

The first set of questions:

- a. What is your base of education?
- b. What was your first relevant position upon completion of your degree?
- c. Was your first job in the private or public sector?
- d. At what point did you decide to pursue a career in public administration and why?
- e. If you had a “do over” how would you change your path to public administration?

2. I hoped to gauge the respondents’ opinions as to what makes an ideal public administrator. A series of questions would indicate the respondent’s knowledge of criteria believed to be requirements for the field of public administration:

- f. What is the ideal education and career background of a public administrator?

g. What three common challenges must be overcome by new public administrators?

h. What three traits or skills help make a public administrator successful?

3. I asked direct questions related to the individual respondent's level of activity to help find future public administrators. I hoped to learn to what degree the respondent might have attempted to influence others to consider a career in public administration, whether the candidate was from either the public or private sectors:

i. Have you ever directly or indirectly influenced or encouraged individuals to consider public administration as a career?

If answered "yes" the respondent was asked five more in-depth questions:

1) Approximately how many people did you encourage?

2) What type of person appealed to you as a likely candidate?

3) What was your means of communicating the opportunity?

4) How many of the individuals were from the private sector?

5) How many of the individuals were from the public sector?

If answered "no" the respondent was asked the following question:

6) Would you consider taking a more active role in sourcing new administrators if provided with a *guideline for recruitment*?

In retrospect I believe my choice of the word "recruitment" did not inspire respondents, or perhaps it confused them since a majority of the respondents did not answer this question.

The focus group for *Private Sector Public Administrators* was small but diverse. It consisted of eight public administrators and professionals in various capacities. Although I did not specifically inquire about their involvement in professional organizations, the individual's level of activity in the field of public administration through such organizations as ICMA either was known by me ahead of time or it came through in their answers to questions relating to any attempts they might have made to help fill the pipeline of professional public administrators. Due to the diversity of the respondents it would be careless for me to try to summarize the views to form a single opinion. I will highlight their responses and later in the paper I will list a few common take-away points.

VIEWPOINTS OF FOCUS GROUP

Respondents have been grouped by position: village, city, county, or other. The names of the respondents will remain anonymous but are listed in the acknowledgement with their prior approval.

1. *Village Administrator I (VA-I)* received a master's degree in public administration (MPA) shortly after having completed undergraduate studies. Early on this individual realized an interest to work in the public sector and received an education to support that decision. VA-I immediately began work in the public sector after college. This path was believed by me to be the traditional path to a career in public administration as defined earlier.
 - a. To VA-I the ideal path to public administration includes an education background in public administration or business. VA-I went on to state that the ideal candidate for public administration must be good at handling adversity, remain positive, and be compassionate for a life in public service. Good communication, time management, and organizational skills are keys to success.
 - b. VA-I actively influences, directly and indirectly, candidates for a career in public administration by any means available. The preferred source for candidates is college students, although VA-I claimed to have had experience finding candidates from the private sector and elected offices.

- c. VA-I had no regrets and would take the exact same career path. VA-I is known for being an active member of ICMA and practices many of the seven recommendations made by the ICMA Advisory Board of Graduate Education.
2. *Village Administrator-II (VA-II)* has an education background in planning, accounting, and business administration. After working for almost 20 years in the private sector, VA-II obtained an MPA.
 - a. Interestingly VA-II came to the realization that a career in public administration was a true calling while serving as an elected official of a large city council. VA-II, if provided a “do over” would have made the switch from private sector to public sector earlier in life.
 - b. VA-II believes anyone wishing to work in the public sector as a manager should have a minimum of an MPA but does not believe that there is one preferred background for a public administrator.
 - c. VA-II listed the challenges with the job of public administrator as related to the technical skills required and dealing with political influences. Successful administrators for VA-II must be skilled in policy research and analysis, in addition to having good communication skills and patience.
 - d. VA-II never directly or indirectly encouraged another person to pursue a career in public administration. VA-II if offered a “guideline for recruitment” would be interested in taking a more active role in finding new administrators but stressed that such a guideline should be position-

specific. “Every community has different needs and will require candidates with the right personalities,” wrote VA-II.

3. *City Administrator-I (CA-I)* obtained dual undergraduate degrees in personnel and finance. Accepting the first relevant position as an out-of-state City Manager immediately upon completion of his undergraduate studies, CA-I also worked for two years in the private sector before pursuing an MPA.
 - a. CA-I does not believe there is an ideal path for anyone entering the field of public administration. CA-I reconsiders a different career path from time to time but has no regrets. The experience gained in a small city, added to the education and work in the private sector, helped prepare CA-I for public administration. After an initial job as a City Manager in a small town CA-I felt better qualified for more responsibility as offered by a larger municipal organization.
 - b. CA-I listed the challenges for public managers as having to confront radical ideologies, dealing with elected officials when they might have forgotten their role as policy makers rather than administrators, and the impacts of federal and state government upon local municipalities.
 - c. CA-I does not recall actively encouraging other individuals to pursue careers in public administration but has hired a couple of interns over the years and might have influenced one or two friends. “Most people I’ve worked with and given opportunities were already interested in public service. I feel like every decision I make encourages five to ten people to

think they can do the job better than I can.” CA-I would never actively *recruit*, but would be willing to serve as a resource to people interested in entering the field or already working and needing assistance.

- d. CA-I believed the keys to being a successful public administrator include commitment to working for the common good and maintaining a solid ethical base.

4. *City Administrator II (CA-II)* has a background in accounting and after working for a short time in private sector retail, obtained an MPA. The inspiration to pursue a career in public administration came from CA-II’s father who served as a local elected official during CA-II’s childhood.

- a. CA-II would take the same path to public service although admitting to “fumbling around for three years” after college as focus was gained. No regrets, however, were stated by CA-II.
- b. CA-II listed the three main challenges for a public administrator as personnel management, establishing communication networks (with the citizens, elected officials, staff, committee members) and fostering a “30,000 foot mentality within the organization...vision.”
- c. A successful public administrator in the opinion of CA-II must be honest/ethical, consistent, and creative. “I’m sure there are others, but as my career moves forward, I see these three as essential characteristics.”

- d. CA-II recalled actively encouraging others to consider a career in public administration. CA-II had typically hired two interns per year and has encouraged four or five of them to become fulltime public administrators.
5. *City Administrator III* (CA-III) received a degree in finance and human resource management approximately eight years before pursuing an MPA. The entire career since high school had been in the public sector. CA-III interestingly served as a County Board Supervisor for five years while being employed with a local municipality in that county. The stint as an elected official was credited for formalizing the realization to pursue a role as a public administrator.
 - a. CA-III valued the diverse experience along the path to a career in public administration. CA-III's career to become a public administrator was summarized as having followed a ground-up path through public sector employment that began with a summer internship that was carried over to full time employment. If offered a do-over CA-III wished to have made a decision to pursue a career in public administration sooner. For CA-III there is no ideal candidate for public administration, stating "Education should provide the framework" for a professional public administrator.
 - b. CA-III listed the challenges to a career in public administration as understanding the political dynamics, dealing with changes within an organization, and relocation to pursue new career opportunities.
 - c. The required traits of a professional public administrator are patience, leadership, and passion for public service.

- d. CA-III reports to have influenced ten to fifteen individuals to seek a career in public administration, of which, four were from the private sector serving their municipality in as elected officials.
6. *County Administrator I (CTY-I)* has an educational background in political science. After having worked in the private and non-profit sectors for over ten years before returning to obtain an MPA, CTY-I also served as a county supervisor prior to accepting a position in public administration.
 - a. Despite the diverse path to a current role as County Administrator, CTY-I would not change a thing in the career path if offered a do-over. For CTY-I there is no ideal path to a career in public administration.
 - b. “Humility to seek help when needed, the ability to make sound decisions, and a willingness to take action are challenges facing today’s public administrators. Successful public administrators must have a clearly defined mission and purpose, empathy so as to treat people well, and the ability to simplify complexity to help policy makers.”
7. *Consultant I (C-I)* has an education background in political science and public administration. C-I was fortunate to have had two city internships after graduation from college: one in planning and one in administration. A fulltime position as Administrative Assistant followed. As a senior in college C-I came to the realization that a career in public administration was in the future. “I wouldn’t change my path.”

- a. C-I believes it is critical for leaders in public administration to have a foundation in management and policy. “Management requires a blend of finance, operations related to performance management, planning and the ability to execute plan. Policy is important from the perspective of generating sound information and understanding the dynamics of decision-making policies.”
 - b. C-I lists the three challenges to public administrators as the ability to establish and build trust with others, leadership skills such as honesty, integrity, and good listening and communication skills.
 - c. C-I has actively encouraged others with leadership skills and an interest in local government to pursue a career in public administration. Face to face conversations are the preferred method to discuss the possibilities of potential candidates for public administration. None of the candidates were obtained from elected ranks and none from the private sector; however, several came from the non-profit sector.
8. *Aspiring Administrator I (AA-I)* received an associates degree in business management and a baccalaureate degree in accounting. AA-I served four years in the military. AA-I worked in the private sector for approximately ten years before making a decision between earning profits for a private sector firm or serving the local community. “My exposure to the breadth of services offered by governmental organizations as an auditor really peaked my interest in pursuing a

career in the public sector.” If offered a do-over, AA-I would have altered the career path by obtaining a MPA early on.

- a. AA-I believes the main challenges to effective public administration are personnel management, resource management, and working with regulatory changes. “Successful public administrators are engaging leaders who can establish an atmosphere of openness, maintain confidence, and a participatory style of leadership. The ideal public administrator must be knowledgeable on a wide range of issues and have the ability to develop and utilize a strong support team.”
- b. Through one-on-one and group discussions AA-I has influenced approximately six private sector individuals and two elected officials to pursue careers in public administration, in addition to a number of individuals already working in the public sector.

SURVEY SUMMARY COMMENTS

Although the focus group used in the *Private Sector Public Administrators Survey* was relatively small, the opinions were as diverse as the backgrounds from which the respondents arrived to a career in public administration. One can ascertain that a sound foundation for successful public administration leaders consists of two essential elements: a relevant education and a willingness to serve the public. Life and career experiences may be diverse but most anyone is welcome to pursue a career in public administration. Only one of the eight participants in the focus group had what I defined as a traditional path to a career in public administration, however, this individual also replied that there is no one path to a career in professional public administration. The entire focus group appeared to be open to a more diverse pool of potential candidates.

The idea of actively pursuing possible candidates for leadership roles in public administration remains a bit less defined. The respondents were split on sources for future public administrators. Of the respondents who answered the question about seeking public administration candidates from the private sector only CA-III gave the impression of having actively pursued this pool while working in the capacity of an elected official.

MILITARY VETERANS AS A SOURCE

As depicted in Figure 1, the enrollment in the MPA program at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh since fall 2008 has been strong (personal conversation, Wescott, R. 2013). Enrollment numbers for the total number of students trended up. Similarly the trend for students who are military veterans or the spouse of a veteran trended up.

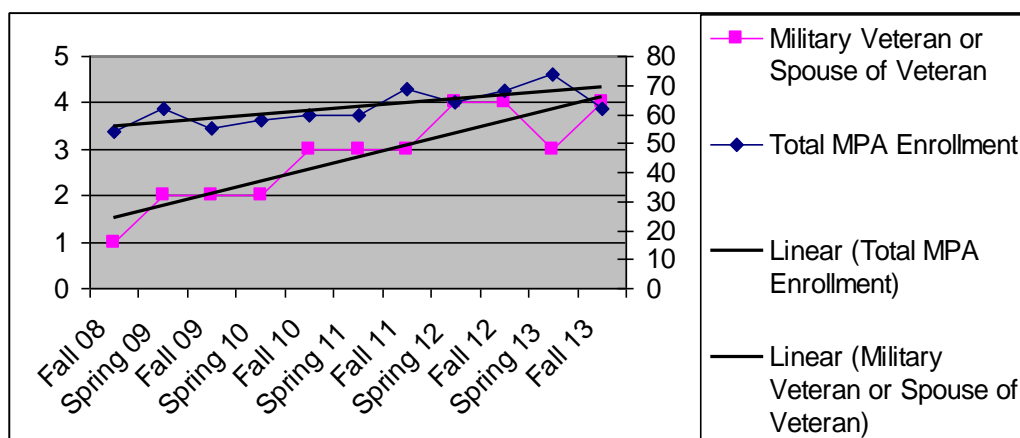


Figure 1 University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh MPA Enrollment Five Year History

As just stated in Survey Summary Comments, a sound foundation for successful public administration leaders consists of two things: a relevant education and a willingness to serve the public. In the opinion of the author, a willingness to publically serve as exemplified through military service therefore should be considered as part of the potential candidate pool for future leadership in the public sector. Example, William Delpato who after serving in the military just “got his dream job” of serving in the public sector for the New Jersey North Hudson Fire Department, which hired 43 veterans in 2013. Fire Chief Frank Montagne summarized his desire to seek military veterans with,

“...the vets are disciplined and skilled, and their military background makes them well suited to the job” (personal communication, 2013). Contrasting life in the military to post military, veteran Richard Hess said, “You go from somewhere you have this tremendous amount of responsibility and then you come home and you have a regular old job, little job. It almost seems insignificant” (personal communication, 2013). Veterans in the department say they feel a sense of purpose.

My employer in the private sector is a large corporation that actively seeks Junior Military Officers to lead the organization’s many manufacturing sites. For many young men and women, the terms of military enlistments are relatively short, perhaps a single three-year or four-year term. Officers may be obligated to serve longer depending upon the arrangements made when contracting. As shown in the MPA enrollment numbers at UW-Oshkosh, there are many skilled young men and women exiting military service with a desire to take the next step in their lives beginning with higher education. The State of Wisconsin joined other states by offering financial support to veterans who desire to study. Wisconsin offers the G.I. Bill which covers tuition as long as the veteran is a native of Wisconsin and attends a Wisconsin university or technical college. Those working to fill the pipeline of candidates for future public administrators would be wise to investigate the pool of former military service men and women.

As indicated by several members of the focus group, individuals from the private sector should be considered to help fill the pipeline of future public administrators due to the diversity of experience these candidates offer. What percentage of undergraduate students and military veterans are aware of the opportunity to work in the role of public

sector management remains unknown in this work. Speaking from experience of my undergraduate studies, pursuing a career in the public sector was not a consideration at the time for me or many of my fellow students. We were interested in joining the business world in pursuit of bonuses for ourselves and profits for our companies. The idea of public service over private profits would not have made sense to an aspiring business professional.

CONCLUSION

1. The availability of qualified candidates for the field of public administration is decreasing. If the pipeline of public administrators has slowed to a drip, then perhaps greater effort must be made to fill the pipeline with more candidates from sources outside the public sector. If efforts to find public administrators are focused at the end of the public sector pipeline where the stream runs dry and ask, "Where is the water?" we are only seeing part of the larger opportunity. We are missing the opportunity to find and train individuals from new sources or with what I have termed as non-traditional backgrounds. Pulling together to fill the pipeline of candidates from various sources provides clear benefits. Future public sector executives should be actively sought not only from the ranks of current public sector employees but from the undergraduate classrooms where careers in public administration might never have considered.

The pool of candidates for future public administration professionals can and should be expanded to include a greater focus on private sector individuals with a desire to serve the public and the willingness to build a strong education framework. In our focus group CA-II, CA-III, and AA-I worked in the private sector. Each regretted having not come to the realization of their 'true calling' and obtained an MPA sooner in their careers. I strongly believe that many other public sector employees with the skills and desire to serve can be identified for advancement to administration.

Incentives could be offered to municipalities with ever tightening budgets to participate in mentoring programs. Barriers preventing professional administrators from

assisting with the identification and development of future leadership should be identified and removed. Speaking for my community, our city administrator who was also a participant in the focus group is not a member of ICMA or other related professional organization, despite having benefited in the past with two interns per year while he worked in a different municipality. Yet temporary and part-time employees continue to be hired as needed to assist with peak workloads in our community.

2. The pool of potential candidates for careers in public administration must be expanded beyond the public sector employment base. Institutions of higher learning must expose undergraduate students to the possibilities of careers in the public sector. Professional organizations such as ICMA can only do so much. Similarly current public administrators should be incented to join professional organizations in order to help identify and develop future leaders. Working public administrators should establish mentoring opportunities within their organizations.

Three individuals from my small survey group reported to have served in an elected capacity while working in the public sector when they felt their true calling to continue to serve the public in a public administration capacity. Often elected officials possess the basic education background and desire to serve the public. Efforts should be made to determine how institutions of higher education, working professionals, and professional organizations reach out to them. We have seen with this one small focus group how eight public administrators and other professionals in the field have reached the conclusion that there is not one path to a career in public administration. Survey respondents stated how their backgrounds varied. Some came through the traditional means of undergraduate to

graduate programs. Other respondents with life experiences interrupted with formal education would not change their path if offered a do-over. They said there is no ideal path to careers in public administrators. The opportunity to find candidates from the private sector (military veterans and elected officials included) is viable to a career in public administration.

The pool of qualified candidates to assume leadership roles in the field of public administration will continue to dry up. Traditional methods of sourcing new talent in the increasingly competitive area of executive management skilled personnel will require openness to new approaches, and new sources to include the private sector.

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