

Introducing Cooperative Practices and a Culture of Management into Public Administration and Public Service Organisations

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Summary:

Jacob conducted a case study of a national Ministry of Culture and Communications, including interviews, observation, and a literature survey of change in bureaucracies. This Ministry was under legislature-driven pressure to become more efficient. Jacob concluded that change is possible in the public sector despite patterns of bureaucratic behaviours that run counter to change. Aided by localised experimentation, members of a public organisational bureaucracy can move beyond mere legislative budget compliance to address wider issues of leadership and learning, management, organisational purpose and meaning, personal responsibility, dialogue and teamwork.

Recommendations:

Jacob advises that public sector leaders will be more successful operating within a framework for change that acknowledges bureaucratic characteristics, while doing the following:

Balance Process with People: The ministry in Jacob's case study received new, mandated budget procedures in order to increase legislative scrutiny of the organisation mission, objectives and programmes. Initially, leadership focused on technical and procedural processes. Over time, they realised that they must also pay attention to attitudes and behaviours that support or block change.

Appreciate that "Leadership" and "Bureaucracy" are Opposites: Leaders move toward a desired vision and future state. Bureaucracies enforce existing rules, regulations and procedures. Change requires leadership, so leadership and specifically active change leadership is inherently difficult in the public sector.

Attend to Power Struggles: Change to structures and procedures can be seen as threats, resulting in fear, resistance and attempts to exploit areas of uncertainty and manoeuvre for self-protection. Leaders must address the places where power struggles are most evident and potentially destructive.

Learn to "Unlearn": Legislation and a "burning platform" can induce short-term change in bureaucracies, but continuous learning sustains. Training and development in dialogue, self-reflection, group dynamics, conflict management and experimentation should occur at all levels, starting with leadership.

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities: Reporting structures and connections must be illuminated at part of the change, on paper but also through situational exercises and coaching.

Allow Time for Change: Even in a world where things seem to change on a moment's notice, change in any large organisation, especially the public sector takes time and concerted effort - 18 to 24 months, or more.