
A Peace Dividend for Local Government

Jerry Johnson and Dean Caldwell

At first glance, it may be difficult to appreciate the possible effect of recent international events on local government administration here in the United States. In the last two years, the threat from the Soviet Union has diminished. Eastern Europe has begun a headlong rush towards friendly relations with the United States, and the United States is winding down a war in the Middle East. These international events have resulted in much talk about a "peace dividend," as the United States inevitably cuts back the present size of the American military force.¹ While the real monetary effects of such cutbacks are uncertain, there will be, we suggest, a sort of "personnel dividend" for local government management. Very simply, as troop cutbacks take effect, there will be a larger talent pool of former military managers from which to draw. Unfortunately, the discipline of public administration and the profession of public management are not in the best position to exploit that talent pool.

Military Administration— A Background

Public administrators and military administrators face the same challenges. They include: identifying and achieving goals, balancing budgets, and providing services. Further, the present political climate in both civilian and military agencies involves doing this despite decreasing fiscal resources. Innovation is not just a professional goal in government agencies; it is a financial necessity if an agency is to pursue its mandate. In this respect the military may have something to offer civilian public agencies—for example, in cutback management. To be able to learn from the military experience, however, civilian public

administrators need to realize the similarities between military and civilian management practices. They need to learn from specific examples in which military and civilian management are closely related.

In the most current texts, and in the minds of most nonmilitary administrators, the military is the quintessential classical management style organization.² While that may be an accurate assessment for combat troops, there are many support personnel for each line person in the military unit. This was illustrated graphically in the Persian Gulf war, in which support troops far outnumbered combat troops. The management of these support troops and their services is similar in nature to the management of many progressive public agencies.

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A specific area where management styles converge is at the base level of command and below. One reason for this may be the increasingly professional orientation of the military member—the institutional or occupational thesis.³ The increased emphasis on service provision as opposed to the emphasis on military functions that prevailed before and during the Vietnam conflict clearly is a factor in the changing orientation of the military member. This also has been illustrated recently in the Persian Gulf, where the military had to build "cities" in a few short months and to provide those "cities" all the services their civilian counterparts would provide. This changing functional focus has required a

Dr. Jerry Johnson is a professor of political science, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, and Dr. Dean Caldwell is a professor of political science, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan.

change in traditional management style. As a result, at the base level, we have seen increasing use of humanistic management techniques. This includes more personal discretion for base commanders and administrative heads for functions such as procurement, budgeting, environmental protection, and family service and social programs.

The modern military base, especially if located in a foreign country, is similar in nature to a small political entity. Within the confines of its border, the military complex contains a business district, housing areas (single and multifamily dwellings), public works departments, educational facilities, and a public safety element. Concurrent with the infrastructure are the social ills that accompany any small town in America. Overcrowding, crime, traffic problems, and environmental and educational issues are some of the concerns of every base commander each day. The challenge of providing quality service is compounded in times of defense department cuts, since compromise between living conditions and the primary military mission of the installation is often the result. Even more ex-

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asperating to the decisionmaker is a population placed in a foreign setting experiencing the stress of living in a different culture and economy. In short, the day of the base commander is not unlike that of a busy local government manager, trying to address demands for better service delivery, given fiscal and political pressures.

An essential difference between the base structure and a local government is the degree of centralization of functions. While the governmental entity is most likely organized along a traditional organizational chart of some type, the military system is composed of worldwide functional commands moving within and among the base commands (NATO, SEATO, CONUS). This results in a matrix organization of personnel as opposed to the traditional hierarchical organization. The philosophy of training military managers (officers) dictates that personnel rotate relatively frequently. This high rate of turnover in job positions fosters continuity problems among personnel and does not promote allegiance to the individual base commander. While or-

ganizational allegiance may be high, the military member frequently adopts the "we can wait this guy out" attitude toward reformers.

The generally accepted solution to the problem is a positive management trend. Given the mobility of personnel, we see two attributes emerge: intercommunication of ideas (networking) and job designs and reforms that are dependent not on individual personalities but on efficient and effective job performance. The method of training and description of job requirements as specified in the Military Occupational Specialties manual (MOS) is designed to be a universal standard. It states: "The MOS in this regulation will be used in personnel classification, authorization documents, or reports of authorized and operation troop strength."⁴ Presumably this standardization is valuable to an incoming commander and makes personnel turnover less of a problem. Local governments sometimes find themselves using ad hoc or outdated (and sometimes illegal) job descriptions. Some effort to develop standard description practices similar to the MOS may be a valuable lesson.

The Military Administrator in the Civilian Setting

It is our suggestion that military administrators have been and are increasingly a valuable addition to the talent pool for local government administration. Military administrators have experience that can be exploited by the civilian sector. They have budgetary, administrative, and leadership skills that are frequently in short supply in small jurisdictions. They have performed in a range of political and economic settings that civilian managers do not normally appreciate.

At the same time, academic education for the officer corps is stressed heavily in the Officer Evaluation Report process, and funding is available both domestically and in the overseas commands for completion of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. As an example, in the NATO command alone there are more than thirty locations where military personnel may pursue MPA degrees. In the United States, there are locations where MPA programs depend on military students for their survival. Two of the largest MPA degree programs in the world are the Troy State University and Golden Gate University programs that serve primarily military students. Military administrators frequently have the same professional academic training as civilian managers. They are qualified public servants in every sense of the word.

These academic and experiential skills historically have provided highly trained personnel for local government entities. Many local governments can point out key personnel who

received their original administrative training in the military. If the local government administrator looks at his or her employees and recognizes the theoretical base and real day-to-day affairs of local government, the local government administrator, and by implication the study of public administration, will realize one of the best sources of expertise may be ex-military administrators.

The convergence of management skills between the military and civilian setting is increasingly apparent if we look to a current reform in the U.S. Army—a new position, the Executive Assistant for Base Operations (Executive Assistant—BASOPS). This civilian position is intended to meet the need for effective management of essentially nonmilitary base operation functions such as budgeting, organization and planning, contracting and execution, evaluation, interaction with the population and basic legal knowledge. In a very broad sense, the new position is somewhat similar to the military base commander. The Army description of the position, in fact, suggests the executive assistant “. . . may act in the absence of the (Base) Commander on all matters except for those involving command authority” (i.e. battlefield decisions).⁵

The essential matter for our discussion is

the opportunity for experienced military managers to move laterally into civilian positions. The Army Civilian Training, Education and Development System (ACTEDS) provides for training to make that career move possible. Masters of public administration degrees available through base education programs are another possible conduit. The Army description of the position suggests that various levels of management experience in various sizes of bases have clear civilian counterparts in local government management; assistant garrison managers are analogous to assistant city managers, etc. and so forth. Managerial qualities for garrison managers are given in Figure 1.

The trend in the Army reflects the trend in the civilian setting for training and professionalism of local government management. Clearly, the Army standards for effective base management closely mirror the desired job traits of any local government manager across the United States. If the position is effective and successful, we can expect the U.S. Army to help train future local government managers.

Conclusion

As a final related issue, what, if anything, will civilian administration do with the in-

creased numbers of qualified applicants with military administrative experience? If we do not understand what they did in a military setting, how can we hope to judge them fairly in civilian job competitions? The discipline of public administration is almost without in-depth knowledge of application of military problem-solving to civilian issues. While academic scholars have devoted a great deal of energy to recruitment and retention in the services, they have yet to apply those lessons to post-military career migration to the public service. Local government managers with military experience are in a unique position to bridge that gap between theoretical scholarly views of military managers and the assimilation of military management skills into local government positions. As a group of professionals, they easily could be more vocal and help educate practitioners about the attributes of the military manager.

The recruitment potential of ex-military members to the public service is high. They enjoy a veteran preference on civil service exams and they already have a positive public service orientation. In short, we can expect the public service option for employment to loom large in the ex-military member's career goals.

The above discussion is a suggestion that as the inevitable cutbacks in the U.S. military

take place, there will be a quality workforce ready and able to enter the public service. This is especially true at the local government level. While academic study of the applicability of military management and managers to public management lags far behind other areas of study, it does not mean that research and hiring cannot take place. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned through a two-way communication between the civilian sector and the military establishment, but the military establishment appears to be in the lead. Of particular interest will be the experience gained in the military of cutback procedures as bases are closed, systems are dismantled, and troops are sent home. In fiscally tight times, those experienced in budget retrenchment may be the most important part of the peace dividend for local governments. **PM**

¹See Crawford, Burgess and Higgs, "Western Stakeholders Assess Economic Effects of Changing Military Priorities," *Points West*, March 1991, pp. 13-20.

²See Beryer and Trice, "How an Organization's Rites Reveal Its Culture," *Current Issues in Public Administration*, 1990, 4th ed. for an example of portraying the military training process as dehumanizing and permanently transforming its participants.

³See Moskos and Wood, *The Military: More Than Just A Job*, Pergamon-Brassey's Press, New York, 1988.

⁴This is, in fact, only a partial list of the 22 sought-after competencies desired by the Army. For a complete list of the MOS/ Executive Assistant-BASOP, see: Personal Communication TAPC-CPF-P memo dated June 15, 1990 (available through the Department of Defense).

⁵Ibid.