



MIND THE GAP!
Leadership that helps bridge the gap between politics and management

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How can we bridge the gap between political leadership and managerial leadership in the austere times? With even greater complexity in administration and management, and the increasing simplicity of politics, we are faced with an accelerating gap between the two. This session will argue that success depends on the ability to bridge this gap.

This session was introduced by setting the scene for local government. The current economic environment is that we live in austere times. Growth has been slower in the five years after this recession than the five years after any other recession. We have a balance sheet recession and people are paying for this by developing more debts. However, there is intense regional variation; GVA growth is not consistent across the country. The impacts of debt on issues such as house building are outlined and unique nature of this recession in forcing individuals to amass personal debts. On this note, it is important to realise that it is not only institutions that are indebted.

Management over leadership is as important as leadership over the management. If you manage without leading there is a danger of dispiriting staff and losing credibility. Moving on to the relationship with management and politics, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of managerial rationality versus political rationality. Chief Executives need to be located in the centre of this dichotomy to enable the gap between the two to be bridged. Moreover, it is vital that regional differences are accounted for in politics; different identities, symbolisms and connections. The analogy of the 'orange chairs' as significant to one office but mundane to another exemplifies this. Politics could be in anything, but won't be in everything. Bridging the gap between political acceptability and managerial implementation bears the key to effective leadership.

After outlining what the gap is and why it is an issue it is important to discuss how we bridge this gap. It is possible to draw parallels between a train and management, with the train representing the enduring quality of management. Trains are entering at different points for different disciplines and move at different speeds like the erratic nature of politics. When trains stop, you have opportunity to bridge politics and management. The danger is that by bridging this gap you become in danger of becoming politically aligned. This will result in the loss of staff, as it is claimed you cannot do this job and 'do' politics at the same time.

The four competing values of a democratic society as found in America;

1. Representation / participation
2. Efficiency / professionalism
3. Social equality (groups not discriminated against by a majority)
4. Individual rights (individuals not discriminated against by a majority)



The balance between the four values makes for politics.

The gap between politics and management has widened; that is specifically the gap between political acceptability and managerial sustainability. We are not smarter than our predecessors, but we have more tools, more knowledge and more specializations. This results in greater defragmentation from the language of the community. Furthermore, in politics there is not an ability to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next, unlike in traditional professions in law and health. Indeed politics is the only role where experience isn't valued. Messages to managers are today more simplistic (i.e. 'cut the budget'), whilst contrasting to the complex specification of the roles.

In American there is more local autonomy with places able to generate their own revenue. However, if the sources of revenue are not sufficient, there is little in the way of support to prevent development of the American phenomenon the ghost town. To combat this, some areas have manufactured identity, such as Cawker City and its huge ball of twine. However, *nostalgia for the misremembered past is no way to run a contemporary government*, and that despite all the evidence there is still no answer to the right balance of political values. The analogy of a doctor providing you with all the information on further clinical procedures, but the patient still unable to decide whether to have mobility or pain relief.

The panel fielded questions from delegates on political accountability to the electorate, a crisis of 'real-world' experience in politicians and what the best measures are for bridging these accelerating gaps. It is vital to be trustworthy (credibility + reliability x intimacy / self-orientation = trust) and that by doing so it allows for sustaining relationships to develop. Finally managerial competence needs to improve to allow for a focus on competence and democratic legitimacy.