POLITICISATION AND MANAGERIAL VALUES: RESPONSES FROM NEW ZEALAND COUNCILLORS

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Abstract

This study assesses the proposition that politicisation of public sector employment leads to government managers moving away from neutrality values and adopting responsive values. Results of a survey of well over 100 councillors in the New Zealand local government system provided limited support to this proposition. Most councillors report managers adopting neutrality values and combining them with elements from trustee and responsive value types in the area of managerial advice. We argue that although most managers accept the traditional role distribution between councillors and managers a small percentage of managers tend to believe that managers have an obligation to ensure that their view of community interest is heard in the policy process.

Introduction

In most democratic governments, more specifically in the countries following the Westminster constitutional system, efforts have been made to ensure that government managers maintain independence in their behaviour. Politicians have been kept out of the employment matters of government managers in the belief that politicisation of government employment compromises the independence of government managers. The assumption is that a

government manager must be in a position to give "advice and counsel … in a fearless and frank way" and this can only be achieved by that person being a career civil servant who cannot be sacked for giving such advice in the event that the minister disagrees with it or does not like it' (Baxter, 1991, 280). Kimber et al, (2003, 63) elaborates: "By eroding senior public servants" tenure and increasing politicisation, making the position of senior officers personally dependent on the favour of ministers, those restructuring the public service could have compromised the conditions that enable public servants to provide ministers with impartial advice in a "frank and fearless" manner'. Tony Ayers, a former Head of the Department of Defence, Commonwealth Government, states that public managers are "paid to give ministers the advice they ought to hear and not what they wanted to hear and that the risk was that when people believed they could be sacked without any apparent reason and without need, they tend to get the advice ministers want to hear" (Windsor, 1996).

There are at least two fundamental flaws with these clams. One is conceptual and the other is empirical. The meaning of 'politicisation' is not clear nor is that of 'frank and fearless advice'. Does it mean government managers act as the unelected trustees of the public? When Tony Ayers claims that ruling politicians 'get what they want to hear' does he mean government managers under a politicised employment relationship would adopt 'responsive' behaviour? It is important that the concepts employed have clarity, are distinguished from one another and are used consistently. Second, there is hardly any empirical evidence to support the claim that under a non-politicised employment relationship government managers provide 'frank and fearless' advice. Haidar & Spooner (2007) asked government managers about these questions and reported on their behaviours under a politicised employment condition. This study asks politicians about the possible politicisation of government managers' employment and the values government managers adopt. It asks about political influence on the employment matters of government managers, the managerial values they experience and ones they prefer.

The paper begins with a discussion of the legal aspects of local government and follows it up with a discussion of the brief history of local government in New Zealand. The method of data collection is then discussed and, finally, the results and findings of the study are presented. This study is one of the first attempts to survey politicians about the employment matters and the values of appointed managers (see Lee, 2001).

Local Government in New Zealand

In New Zealand (NZ), local authorities are creatures of statutes. They owe their origin, either individually or a as a class, to an Act of Parliament. Legally, individual local government units are like statutory incorporations (Bush, 1980, 111). The generic term 'the council' is commonly used in two meanings. In its broader definition a council means the institution and includes elected members, staff, resources, facilities, territory and so forth. In the second meaning a council refers to the elected members, which is governing body. Elected members are the council and are the fount of all legal authority. "Sovereignty rests with the elected members. Elected members as the council are answerable for their actions to the public and in a court of law (Bush, 1980, 132).

History and Origin
New Zealand operates under a two tier system of government: Central government and local government. One of the most comprehensive reviews of sub-national governments, including local government, was initiated by the Labour Government in 1987 and resulted, among other things, in a more rigid demarcation between management and elected members (Anderson & Norgrove, 1997, 149). The councillors' role was explicitly limited to policy formulation, budgetary control and performance monitoring. The chief executive officer, responsible to the councillors, was to be the council's only direct employee and in turn the employer of the remaining staff on the council's staff. He or she must be appointed under a contract (capable of being renewed for a further two years) for a term no longer than five years" (Anderson & Norgrove, 1997, 118).

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) by and large carries forward reforms introduced in the late 1980s. The LGA 2002 also makes a clear distinction between the duties and responsibilities of elected members (EM) and appointed managers (AM) in the area of the employment relationship of AMs. Under the current Act, EMs appoint a Chief Executive (CE) (s. 42, 1). CEs are appointed on performance contracts which are limited to no more than five years, with a two year extension if the CE applies for and succeeds in a statutorily defined review process (Schedule 7, section 34). A CE in turn is responsible, among others, for "employing, on behalf of local authority, the staff of the local authority (s42, g); and negotiating the terms of employment of the staff of the local authority (s42, h).

Research design and conceptual framework

This study focuses on two research questions: Whether the employment relationship of NZ AMs is politicised and what values guide the behaviour of AMs while they carry our council work. In order to examine the values AMs adopt in their relationship with councillors, we have identified three main dimensions; object of obedience, partisanship and anonymity. Based on these three dimensions three ideal types (Weber, 1949) of value patterns labelled neutral, responsive and trustee have been identified (Table 1). Each pattern offers a benchmark against which actual behaviour of AMs is analysed.

In the context of ideal types (Table 1), neutral public managers obey the law and their political superiors conditional upon the latter acting within the law (Armstrong, 1989, Quinlan, 1993). They are non-partisan, 'party neutral' but not 'politically neutered' (Uhr, 1987: 22) in their dealings with political superiors. Neutrality implies a division of role between public managers and political superiors, where public managers participate in the policy process by providing honest and frank advice. In doing so they take into account the goals of political superiors, the policy merits and the public interest. Public managers may vary in adopting neutrality values. Some may actively persuade politicians to adopt their recommendations while others may consider their task finished with the provision of advice (Keating, 1990). They faithfully

implement lawful policies and instructions decided by political superiors, even if they do not agree with them (Heclo, 1975; Spann, 1973; Thompson, 1985). In this relationship public managers are anonymous; they do not make public comments or divulge information except with proper authorisation from or on behalf of their political superiors (Williams, 1985; Kernaghan, 1976).

Table 1: Dimension and pattern of ideal type behaviour

Dimensions	Patterns		
	Neutral	Trustee	Responsive
Object of Obedience	Lawful demands of elected official	The public interest	Elected official
Partisanship	Non-Partisan	The public interest	To elected official
Anonymity	Anonymous	Not-Anonymous to public interest concerns	Not-Anonymous to elected official concerns

Public managers following the "trustee" value-pattern see society or the public as the ultimate object of obedience. They are non-partisan in relation to political parties but see themselves as 'non-elected trustees' of the sovereign power. They exercise that power 'with special sensitivity to the public interest' (Buchanan, 1975: 426). Trustees serve their superiors so long as the latter work for the public interest (Jackson, 1988: 247). They promote the public interest in their advice, only implement policies consistent with the public interest and resist policies that are not. Their resistance includes speaking out leaking information, whistle blowing and even secret white-anting from within if necessary (Jackson, 1988).

Responsive public managers also obey their political superiors but do not confine themselves 'to the letter and spirit of existing law'. They are 'committed believers who would go about doing whatever was necessary to achieve [their superiors'] policy goals' (Aberbach

and Rockman, 1994: 466). Responsive public managers provide advice and information that support their superiors' policy objectives and might suppress adverse information and even 'cook' data to further the interests of their superiors (Rourke, 1992: 545). It follows that responsive public managers eschew anonymity and would not hesitate to make public comments and manage information to increase support for the policies and goals of their superiors. This describes a public manager who agrees with ideologies of their political superiors and responds to the unlawful demands of politicians on their own volition. Studies of public managers in Malaysia suggested that there could be a variation in responsive behaviour (Haidar et al 2004). In this situation council officers respond to the unreasonable demands of councillors only under pressure not on their own volition. They may give in to the pressures of politicians but only reluctantly.

Politicisation in the context of public management has multiple meanings (Weller, 1989). This paper argues that politicisation occurs when elected members influence the human resource management dimensions of the employment relationship (ER) of council employees or managers.

Method of data collection and sample

The employment relationship of AMs has been assessed in terms of seven human resource dimensions: appointment, promotion, disciplinary matters, remuneration, training and development, reappointment, and performance evaluation. The responses of EMs were collected on a five point Likert type scale that ranged from not influential, to very influential. The section relating to values has been assessed in terms of the three dimensions and the four patterns developed reflecting all three dimensions. The conceptual framework identifies three main patterns and, based on our Malaysian studies (Haidar et al 2004), an added variation in our responsive pattern was identified. The responses of EMs were collected on a five point Likert type scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Responses of EMs were collected on two aspects of managerial behaviour: their preference and their experience. The experience aspect assessed values EMs believe

actually guide the behaviour of AMs and the preference aspect assessed values EMs believe should guide their behaviour.

There are 85 local authorities in New Zealand and we have selected 19 of them, based on a combination of factors that makes them representative of the sector as a whole. Factors that were considered include size, population, rural/urban mix, rate of growth and location. The Web pages of each organisation were accessed for the names and contact information of their EMs and 247 EMs were subsequently identified. The questionnaire was sent to all 247 EMs. Of these, 95 completed forms were returned which equates to a response rate of 38.5 percent. This rate is considered satisfactory for this type of survey where no follow-up was applied.

Results

This section presents the responses of EMs in two parts. The first part presents results regarding the question whether employment relationship of NZ AMs is politicised or not. The second part presents their preferences and experiences regarding values that they believe should guide and actually guide the actions of AMs.

Politicisation
Table 2 presents responses of EMs about the level of influence they currently have over the employment matters of AMs.   The responses of EMs were collected on a five point Likert type scale that ranged from not influential, somewhat influential, influential, very influential, decisive and don't know. For the purpose of simplicity, this paper presents the responses in three categories, not influential, influential and don' know. The 'influential' category included responses in the categories of somewhat influential, influential, very influential and decisive.

Table 2: Views of EMs about their influence on ER of AMs

	Not influential	Influential	Don't know
Appointments	50.0	47.8	2.2
Promotions	56.8	39.8	3.4
Disciplinary matters	57.3	40.4	2.2
Remuneration	59.6	38.2	2.2
Training and career development	53.9	44.9	1.1
Re-appointment and non re-appointment	46.6	64.8	1.1
Performance evaluation	38.2	60.6	1.1

Under the current LGA 2002 EMs in New Zealand are empowered to control the employment relationship of the Chief Executives (CE). The CE in turn controls the employment matters of other senior managers. The Table 1 clearly shows that majority of EMs are not only influential in the HR dimensions of the CEs but they are also influential in the employment matters of the senior managers as well. The percentage of EMs who perceive that they have influence over the employment matters of AMs ranges from 38.2 to 64.8.

Managerial values
The responses of EMs on managerial values were collected on a five point Likert type scale that ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree and undecided. For the purpose of simplicity, this paper presents the responses in three categories, disagree, agree and undecided. Agree category includes agree and strongly agree while disagree category includes strongly disagree and disagree.

Table 3: Managerial values preferred and experienced by EMs

Trustee	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience
T1. make unauthorised public comment about council policies they believe are not in the community interest	88.4	81.1	3.2	5.3	8.4	13.7
T2. Disclose unauthorised information when they believe it is in the community interest to do so.	84.2	80.7	5.3	7.5	10.6	11.8
T3. Only implement council policies they believe are in the community interest.	83.0	69.2	2.1	13.8	14.9	17.0
T4. Only consider the community interest when providing policy advice to council.	68.1	70.2	3.2	9.6	28.7	20.2
T5. Having provided their policy advice, actively persuade elected members to adopt recommendations that, in their view, best serves community interest.	66.6	48.9	6.5	9.6	26.9	41.5

Neutral	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience
N1. Never make unauthorised public comment about council policies, even if they believe the policies are against the community interest.	23.4	35.1	7.4	8.5	69.1	56.4
N2. Never make unauthorised disclosure of official information.	24.2	24.2	2.1	11.6	73.7	64.2
N3. Implement all lawful council policies, even if they believe these policies are against the community interest.	16	19	7.4	7.4	76.6	73.7
N4. Consider both the community interest and the political interests of elected members when providing policy advice to council.	45.8	39.4	2.1	7.4	52.1	53.2
N5. Having provided their policy advice, leave elected members alone to accept or reject their advice.	13.8	24.5	00	9.6	86.1	66

Reluctant Responsive	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience
RR1. Make unauthorised public comments when they are under pressure from elected members to do so.	94.6	84.1	4.3	8.5	1.1	7.4
RR2. Disclose unauthorised information when they are under pressure from elected members to do so.	90.4	81.9	6.4	11.6	3.2	6.4
RR3. Implement unlawful requests from elected members when they are under pressure from elected members to do so.	97.9	84	00	6.4	2.2	9.5
RR4. Frame and limit their policy advice to suit the political interests of elected members when they are under pressure from elected members to do so.	97.9	68.4	1.1	11.6	1.1	20

Proactive responsive	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience	Preference	Experience
PR1. Make unauthorised public comment in support of the political interests of elected members.	100	85.3	00	6.3	00	8.4
PR2. Disclose unauthorised information in support of the political interests of elected members.	100	86.3	00	8.4	00	5.3
PR3. Only implement policies that promote the political interests of elected members.	93.7	88.3	3.2	5.3	3.2	6.4
PR4. Frame and limit their policy advice to suit the political interests of elected members.	95.8	79	1.1	10.5	3.2	10.6

A number of findings stand out very clearly from Table 3. EMs prefer AMs to act as neutral managers: A large majority of them prefer AMs to act neither as trustees nor as hired guns. Preferences about the managerial values of a large number of EMs match with their experiences. A large majority of EMs prefer AMs not to act as trustees and nor do the AMs wish to act as trustees. EMs do not want AMs to act as the saviour of the community interest and, by and large, managers are not viewed by EMs acting as the saviour of the community interest either. In others words, there is very little gap between the preferences and experiences of a large majority of EMs regarding the role of AMs in the trustee pattern. Neither do councillors prefer appointed managers to be responsive. This is matched by the actual behaviour of AMs. Most EMs do not believe that AMs are responsive, whether on their own volition nor under pressure. AMs are not seen acting as hired guns by councillors. The majority of AMs do no not adopt responsive values despite EMs saying that the employment relationship of AMs is politicised. EMs prefer AMs to act as neutral public servants. Experiences of most EMs supports what they prefer on the neutrality pattern. Having said that, however, it appears that there are some gaps in the preferences and the experiences of EMs in terms of some of the values adopted by AMs.

On the trustee pattern, it is clear that on most items there is not much gap between the preferences and experiences of EMs. More than 80 percent of the EMs believe that AMs should neither disclose information nor should they make public comment about council policies. Nor should they drag their feet in implementing policies even if they believe that the policy does not serve the community interest. By and large expectations are matched by the experiences of EMs on these items. However, preferences and experiences of EMs vary with regard to managerial advice. While over 28 percent of EMs prefer that community interest should be the only consideration in managerial advice; only around 20 percent of EMs perceive that community interest should be major consideration in managerial advice. In other words, more EMs prefer AMs to focus mostly on community interest in their advice but EMs are reporting that AMs include other elements in their advice. These responses are quite consistent and seem to support responses of EMs in the

responsive pattern and the neutrality pattern (see below). On the trustee pattern, the more glaring gap between the preferences and experiences of EMs is on the last item i.e. T5. While more than 41 percent of EMs perceive that AMs keep on persuading EMs to accept their advice, only 26 percent of EMs believe that officers should do so. The most glaring gap appears to be in the areas of managerial advice. This theme runs through the most of the responses of the EMs. Let us pursue a few of them.

On the neutrality pattern, there is very little gap between the preferences and experiences of EMs in terms of the value adopted by AMs except for the last item i.e. N5. While little over 86 percent of EMs believe that a manager's job finishes with providing the advice and that they should leave EMs alone to accept or reject their advice; only 66 percent of EMs believe that AMs do so. In other words there is big gap between the preferences and experiences of EMs. More, EMs prefer to be left alone but officers do not leave them alone. There is a consistency in the behaviours of AMs which, according to these results, EMs do not like. We have already mentioned that on a similar question in the trustee pattern almost half of the EMs responding to our survey believe that officers do not leave them alone.

By and large, responses from EMs show that they do not want AMs to be responsive, whether on their own volition or under pressure. These preferences of EMs match with their experience. EMs, by and large, do not perceive that AMs are responsive neither on their own volition nor under pressure from EMs. On the reluctant responsive pattern, on most items, there is very little gap between the preferences and experiences on the behaviour of AMs except one which is consistent with other responses of EMs. Most EMs prefer AMs not to tailor their advice to suit the political interest of councillors but 20 percent EMs believe that AMs do so under pressure. A little over 10 percent of EMs believe that AMs tailor their advice to suit the political interests of EMs on their own volition.

Discussion

Findings from this study show that although elected members (EM) are not supposed to influence employment matters of appointed managers (AM) other than the CEs, they actually are influential over the employment matters of senior managers. We have found that CEs on their own volition, seek advice from the elected members on the employment matters of senior managers because the latter work closely with the former. As one elected member says: "As an elected member I have been involved with the appointment of CEOs but fully understand it is the CEO's job to appoint and deal with all employment matters. However, sometimes I have been asked by the CEO for my opinion regarding staff". This shows similarity to our findings from the Gippsland regions in Victoria, Australia. We have argued that senior manager employment in the local government units in Gippsland is a concurrent jurisdiction (Pullin and Haidar, 1999).

Most EMs report that under a politicised employment relationship, managers adopt neither the responsive values nor the trustee values: Most EMs report that AMs adopt neutral values which is what ruling politicians prefer. They prefer managers to adopt neutral rather than responsive values or the trustee values in their actions. EMs prefer managers to act neither as unelected trustee of community interests nor as their hired guns. The preferences of EMs, however, vary from their experiences on the issue of managerial advice across all three patterns identified in this study. While more than 41 percent of EMs find that AMs keep on persuading EMs to accept their advice only 26 percent of EMs prefer AMs to do so. While little over 86 percent of EMs believe that a manager's job finishes with providing the advice and they should leave EMs alone to accept or reject their advice; only 66 percent of EMs believe that AMs do so in practice. These results suggest that a there are AMs who, a sizeable percentage of EMs believe, adopt and prefer to adopt the role of trustees. Most EMs prefer AMs not to adopt responsive values in their advice but 20 percent EMs believe that AMs do so under pressure. A little over 10 percent of EMs believe that AMs adopt responsive values in their advice on their own volition. These results suggest that although

most AMs adopt neutrality values, there are managers in NZ local government who adopt trustee and reluctant responsive values as well while providing advice.

AMs adopt neutrality values even working under a politicised employment for a variety of reasons. The neutrality ethic is a prudent principle from the self-interest perspective of government managers. A manager with neutrality orientation can hold on to a job longer than a responsive manager or a trustee, as the neutral manager can continue working for many political groups while a responsive manager or a trustee can only work for a political group that agrees with his or her views and attitudes. Neutrality as an ideal is "more understandable and functional for career executives than other ideals such as 'public service' or 'public interest'" (Maranto and Skelley, 1992, 184). Neutral managers by distancing themselves from identification with any particular group can "preserve their reputation for indispensable competence and fairness" (Caiden, 1996, 21). The neutrality ethic, as Caiden argued, also fits in with certain personality types and for them it has remained a 'beguiling idea'. Principles of neutrality ethic fit very well with people who prefer not to take risks, hate practical politics and yet desire comfort, security, and upward mobility (Caiden, 1996, 22-23).

EMs prefer managers ho adopt neutral values because this set of values recognises the distribution of power between managers and politicians (Maranto and Skelley, 1992; Helco, 1977). In local government, EMs are invested with power and AMs exercise power delegated to them by councillors. This distribution of power recognises the fact that Ems, as representatives, formulate policies and remain accountable to their electors for their actions. This accountability requires, among others, that policies and strategies are adopted and implemented that reflect the wishes of the electors. It is quite natural that EMs would like to have a advice that they are comfortable with and that reflects the wishes of their electors.

A sizeable percentage of EMs report that some managers adopt trustee values in their advice. Such EMs in NZ believe that managers

adopt this behaviour because they do not like to accept the distribution of power in the area of managerial advice. As one EM says: "Elected members are decision makers having been elected to control the direction of local authorities. Some managers are apt to take on a political role which causes conflict between them and elected members". Another EM supports this view: "I believe the key problem in my experience in local government is management not providing sound advice to council and then not implementing decisions the management and staff do not agree. The real battlefield is between elected member and management/staff". Some councillors seem to believe that managers push them to accept their advice because they want to serve their own interest rather than the community's interests. As one EM says: "Administration uses its power to enlighten or darken policy issues to suit their needs most times, not elected members or public". It must be noted however that managers may, in pushing councillors to accept their advice, be motivated by a belief that EMs work for parochial political interest rather than community interests.

A small percentage of EMs, believe that there are AMs in NZ local government who adopt responsive values in their advice. Almost one fifth of EMs believe that AMs adopt responsive values in their advice under pressure. This finding supports the common assumption that under a politicised employment managers are likely to politicise their advice for fear of losing their jobs. We have also found that one tenth of EMs believe that some AMs adopt responsive values in their advice on their own volition. This study found that EMs influence the appointment, reappointment not only of CEs but also of most AMs. It is possible that EMs through their influence over the selection and appointment process ensures that those AMs are appointed who have similar views as those of EMs.

Conclusion

In a rare study of ruling politicians in the New Zealand local government this study found that working under politicised employment conditions government managers in their behaviour combine neutrality values with elements from trustee and responsive values. These findings thus indicate that the traditional

role distribution between politicians and managers needs reconsideration. The challenge is to ensure provision of impartial advice from managers working under politicised employment conditions.

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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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ADVANCING THE QUALITY OF HRM AND HRD IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

PREFACE

As the globalisation of markets continues at a rapid pace, the challenges for HR managers and those teaching HR increase. Human Resource Management practices vary between countries, sector, size and ownership of organizations. As a result it is important to acknowledge that what are largely considered to be 'Western' style HRM practices may not be relevant in other cultures. Despite this, some lessons may be learned from organizational experiences that can be transferred across countries and cultures through globalisation.

Globalisation is used to define a combination of factors - a single market place with growing free trade among nations; the increasing flow and sharing of information; and connections and opportunities for organisations and people to interact around the world without being constrained by national boundaries. To date globalisation has been a prime force for spreading knowledge through technology. Knowledge about production methods, management techniques, export markets, and economic policies is available at very low cost, and this knowledge represents a valuable resource for both developed and developing countries. It has been suggested that the HRD profession must include not only economic development and workplace learning, but it must also be committed to the political, social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual development of people around the world, particularly, as global success depends on utilizing the resources and diverse talents and capabilities of the broadest possible spectrum of humanity.

This conference draws from the research and experiences of participants to provide lessons and examples regarding how some organizations and individuals are attempting to utilise HRM strategies in order to promote agility and excellence and, in some cases, globalise business through such diverse topics as:

- HRD and HRM policy
- Organisational culture and power
- ER processes: collective and individual
- Community resource development
- HRM outcomes: empowerment, job satisfaction and productivity
- Workplace learning
- Values, politics, power, ethics and HRD
- Employment relations at public policy level
- HR and corporate sustainability
- Leadership and other areas.

The papers presented in these Proceedings have all been subject to peer referee by two reviewers with comments offered to authors.

The conference organisers would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the College of Management at Mahidol University for generously hosting this 17th Annual Conference of IERA. We also wish to express our thanks to the University of Technology, Sydney for its financial and administrative support of the conference. Special thanks to Virginia Furse, who worked tirelessly to produce these Proceedings and other materials critical to the success of the conference

The Conference Organisers are sure this 17th IERA Conference will be a rich and rewarding learning experience for everyone involved. We look forward to welcoming you to Bangkok.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS