

## Trust, accountability and legitimacy: a question of the “Good Folk” and “Glass Ceilings”

2017 is going to represent a “watershed” for the *International Journal of Public Leadership (IJPL)*, which has been going from strength to strength over the last two years. Although it is a relatively new journal, I am delighted to see significant increases in both submissions and downloads and look forward to a very positive future!

The year 2016 has been a most intriguing year for public leadership. The migration crisis across Europe, the Brexit vote in the UK and the turmoil of political polarization in the USA illustrate some of the major tensions which may just represent a global watershed in public leadership. Trust, accountability and legitimacy are three essential requirements of creating and demonstrating public value. In this first issue of 2017, we offer an interesting array of papers that each takes a stance on how trust, accountability and legitimacy manifest themselves at different levels and within different service areas of public leadership. The issue also extends its focus to other developing countries within the world with articles that consider the importance of trust, accountability and legitimacy in Eastern Europe and Africa.

I am pleased that we can start our first journal of 2017 with an insightful interview of Henry Mintzberg, by Dr Cam Caldwell, in which the issues of “leadership” and “communityship” are explored. This also gives me the opportunity of thanking Dr Cam Caldwell and his colleague Professor Verl Anderson for their steerage of a forthcoming special edition on the very issue of ethical leadership in troubled times, which will be our second issue of 2017. The interview clearly identifies that the challenge for public leaders is to focus more on “community” rather than “individual” leadership. Mintzberg is not optimistic that the tide can be turned quickly; but, turn, it must. The interview highlights some of the advice that Mintzberg offers. In response to the question: what do you think leaders of today need to do to earn and retain public trust? Mintzberg first disagreed that today’s leaders are being held accountable to a high ethical standard and then made the point that public expectations are so low right now for so many leaders.

The importance of trust and levels of accountability feature in the second paper, itself representing a viewpoint on the inherent responsibility placed on public leaders to earn and maintain the trust of the public for whom they serve. John Weaver tells us that “those that work with intelligence or classified material should be held accountable to the public for their actions” and, further, that abrogation of that responsibility puts the safety and potentially the lives of others, at significant risk. Yet, the author argues, selective action is taken dependent upon the role of the transgressor. The conclusion to this paper reinforces the importance of trust and accountability at levels beyond the individual and the organization. The compromise of classified data clearly results in the sense of embarrassment experienced by the organization and their leaders. This in turn reduces the confidence and trust that the citizens have with regards to the public-sector organization. This lowering of confidence can also move beyond the border of the nation and could have an impact on other countries and their willingness to trust the nation where the breach took place.

The legitimacy of leadership can be questioned because of inequitable gender-based leadership. This point is driven home by our third paper in which Mary Spirou argues that interest in the participation of women in positions of leadership is increasingly the subject of considerable attention and recent research, although it is suggested that this may be perceived of as a possible “glass-ceiling” condition, which is one way of saying that women are perceived to be struggling more than ever to reach the top level in their chosen careers.



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This research, that focusses on the state legislature of Georgia, is thus timely. Spirou asks whether and how we can create alternative models of leadership, and what is the role of women within these models? She asks whether there is a need to encourage and formally cultivate these alternative models. The answers are illuminating, particularly the observation that societal issues play a very important role and (as with the role of “educators” in the African context) that political parties can play a critical role in furthering the participation of women in elected office. I will leave you to explore the remainder!

Legitimacy is a concept that is often taken for granted by some leaders. However, we must recognize that it is not just what a leader “does” that can either reinforce or defeat the legitimacy of the wider concept of leadership, but also what a person says and how they say it. A key part of public leadership is that of public speaking. In an interesting African study, we can consider the role that “educators” have as pseudo public leaders in preparing our leaders for the future. In this research study, Kankam and Boateng tell us that from their research, it appeared that early career leaders often find public speaking a huge challenge, resulting in demonstrable anxiety and thus, poor performance. In this sense, educators can make a big difference. Thus, we can infer that educators play a critical role as public leaders in creating an environment that enables learners to develop their skills without fear of failure or derision. As the authors suggest, “public speaking anxiety may stem from numerous sources, such as public speaking skills, fluency in a foreign language, emotional predispositions towards public speaking, and characteristics of the public speaking situation itself”. Communication skills are an important attribute for leaders and potential leaders. “Speech anxiety affects future leaders and college students”. However, the authors argue, great speakers are not immune to this. Educators thus play an important role in creating an environment that encourages a climate where everyone’s voice is equally respected and heard. Trust plays an important role from the earliest points of a leader’s development and those responsible for creating such climates should consider the leadership role that they undertake. A key message from this paper is that situational factors are often more impactful than personal (trait) factors.

Finally, the issue considers one area of public service in which we – as citizens – place our trust directly in the hands of those who care for our loved ones, the increasing proportion of our elderly and frail, a demographic trend that is evident across the globe. In this paper, Giedre Geneviciute-Janoniene and colleagues consider the attitudes of staff members towards the development of elder care organizations, considering the role of leadership effectiveness in the private and public sectors in post-Soviet countries. The rapidly changing political, economic and social environment put organizations under pressure to be ready for change and development constantly. Diversity of welfare services is not universally welcomed and the attitudes of staff can also be influenced by the dominant culture and climate, an area in which leadership is viewed as critical. The acceptance of change and the influence of the change agent’s leadership effectiveness was explored. The results showed that contrary to the authors expectations there were no significant correlations between different aspects of perceived leadership effectiveness and employees’ intentions to change, although perceived higher leadership effectiveness was associated with more positive attitudes of staff members towards development of elder care organizations. In this sense, perhaps we can begin to see the importance of internal trust between the leader and the led? Internal legitimacy may thus be just as important as external legitimacy. Perceived leadership effectiveness is not a universal predictor for employees’ positive attitudes towards organizational development. It is more context based. Therefore, the authors argue that practitioners need to consider the results of the study and differentiate organizational change programmes between private and public sectors.

In summary, this issues explores some of those important trust-related issues that sit at the heart of public leadership and our contributors have raised some important questions for further debate. A common theme between the papers is the role of leaders in “cultivating” the right conditions for the emergence of diverse leaders. Can we, as Mintzberg has argued, encourage the “Good Folk” to rise to the surface of collective leadership, or does the “Glass Ceiling” as described by Spirou continue to thicken when such attempts are made to introduce democracy and participation within the leadership arena? We encourage further debate within the covers of future *IJPL* issues in 2017 and beyond.

**Dr Stephen Brookes**