

MANAGERIAL CONCEPTS REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES

by

Larry J. Gordon, M.S., M.P.H.

Administrator for Health and Environmental Programs ,

New Mexico Health and Social Services Department, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Presented at the 29th Annual Conference, Western Association of Food and Drug Officials, August 9-12, 1970, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The lack of firm, explicit and practical management foundations for many of our Nation's federal, state, and local environmental health programs has been all too obvious in recent years. This weakness has been pinpointed and noticeable during this "age of the environment", which began in the late 60's and will no doubt continue far into the future. There is no longer any doubt that the environment must be managed and will be managed. The only remaining questions relate to "how" and "by whom". Traditionally, trained and experienced "environmental healthers" have frequently not exhibited the management knowledge and capability to cope with or show leadership regarding the new-found public and political pressures, organizational trends, expanded program methodology, legislative demands and mandates, broadened scope, and evolving program goals. All too frequently our environmental health leaders have been viewed as negative obstructionists rather than constructive leaders, and have exhibited territorial defense mechanisms in lieu of creating, promoting, and justifying effective program and organizational concepts to meet the public clamor for a quality environment. "There go my people and I am their leader" has become a truism.

1) Let's bury the notion that managers in the public sector are inferior to those in the private sector, although there are many who subscribe to that point of view. The management inadequacies and bureaucratic bunglings are as great in private industry, business, professional associations, and voluntary groups as in government -- they are just more visible in government because of the necessity of public accountability.

2) Government will respond to modern management techniques just as well, but perhaps not as fast, as private enterprise. Governmental managers have additional hurdles and points of endorsement or approval in order to change within the democratic process.

3) Being a competent, professional manager does not depend on mastering a particular technical system, but is based on understanding and systematically applying the work of management in the areas of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. This is perhaps one of the most important and critical concepts to master. Most "managers" have become managers after being successful technicians, and have frequently been "selected out" because of their proficiency as technicians. This system of promotion to management ranks may not be the best, but is quite common. Those managers who continue to ply their technical skills and continue to act as specialists instead of developing skills in terms of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling may never master the management arts. However, they may continue to be managers to the detriment of their agencies, programs, objectives, personnel, and the public.

4) A simple definition of management is "getting things done through other people." The manager who attempts to carry out every function or review every detail of his organization's function may find that he cannot see the forest for the trees, and, in fact, does not have time to be a manager.

5) Managers should be willing to create, innovate, and propose new organizations or methods where needed instead of being slaves to tradition and routine. Many managers become intent on defending tradition and their own territory that they do not have time or talents to plan and promote necessary changes.

6) Managers must make every effort to recruit and retain the best talent available even if this means recruiting personnel better qualified than the top manager. I have frequently observed a management fear of such well-qualified personnel.

7) Managers must delegate freely and effectively in order to have time to carry out the most important management functions. This also prevents the manager from becoming a bottle-neck and improves the functions, value, and morale of subordinates.

8) Decision-making may well be the most important management function. But decisions must be made on the basis of the best facts available at the time. Some managers are so concerned about doing the right things that they do nothing they simply study the problem to death. Frequently, there is more than one good answer to the problem -- and the manager must make the decision in order for his organization to get on with the job.

9) Considering all reasonable alternatives leading to resolving perceived problems sometimes seems to be a lost art. Alternatives to problem-solving may vary from consciously choosing an alternative to doing nothing, through studying fresh and unusual approaches, to immediately getting locked into single solution alternatives which lead to a pre-selected method of attempting to solve problems. The public, legislators, and governmental managers are constantly faced with the question of identifying and choosing alternative solutions to problems. Frequently, we find that all reasonable alternatives have not been considered, and that, in fact, we have by-passed the opportunity to consider all viable alternatives due to single solution decisions having already been made by those interests which stand to profit the most from the action, rather than the decision having been made on the basis of providing the greatest good for the largest number over the longest period of time.

Examples:

- a) Being allowed the opportunity to vote on a flood control project instead of considering the alternatives of different types of land-use, retarding population growth, developing recreational areas in the flood area, or channeling growth into more dense residential developments.**
- b) Controversy over the location of a freeway instead of rationally considering other alternatives of no freeway, changing land-use patterns, retarding population growth, or rapid mass transportation.**
- c) The continuing problem and controversy regarding the Nation's energy supply. In this case we are repeatedly led past the level of realistically considering the development of energy sources other than those desired by the fossil fuel industry so**

we continually lose the opportunity to develop solar or other more viable energy sources.

10) Developing mature, productive, effective, knowledgeable employees and associates make the manager look good. Give credit where credit is due. Utilize the principal that each of your employees should know more about his specific responsibilities than you do, or the organization is a failure.

11) The duties of every level of management and each employee should be specific and reasonably discrete. A manager's duties and responsibilities are not the sum total of that of his staff. A serious managerial and organizational problem exists when more than one person in an organization is perceived to have the same responsibilities in whole or in part.

Governmental agencies, programs, and efforts have literally mushroomed at all levels of government in the last ten to fifteen years. This has resulted in a multiplicity of new organizations and governmental activities being created without sufficient planning in many cases. Citizens and Legislatures have sometimes been perplexed with the monsters that have been created. Agency personnel find themselves administering programs and attempting to solve problems in the absence of proper legislative guidance or policies. Managers are frequently in a quandary as to whether they should be advocating the perceived needs of their constituents, or simply reacting to available legislative direction. Lawmakers have created agencies which are visualized as institutions to protect consumer interests, but many of these same agencies have evolved into institutions which seem to protect the interests of those whom they are designed to regulate. Other agencies have presumably had legislative mandate to protect and promote the interests of a given industry or constituency, and some of these agencies have been saddled with a conflict of interest by being charged with efforts to protect the consumer. Then still other governmental organizations have seemingly lost sight of the over-riding necessity for public accountability and openness. Important

decisions continue to be made in back rooms and behind closed doors in the absence of the lights of public opinion.

The terms "goals, missions, and objectives" are frequently used somewhat interchangeably, without recourse to reasonably clear definitions.

A goal simply indicates the "ultimate desired condition." Objectives are specific landmarks to be achieved in attaining the goal. Therefore, a statement of a 'goal' may be somewhat ethereal, nebulous, and even unattainable, but it does provide an indication of general direction to which all program objectives should be tied.

A suggested goal tied to environmental programs might be "ensuring an environment that will confer optimal health, safety, comfort, and well-being on this and future generations."

Another important and basic factor in many environmental agencies and programs is the statement of a mission. Simply stated, a mission is a statement indicating an agency's constituency or clientele. For example, an environmental agency should have a mission of consumer protection and public service. Certain types of agencies such as an agriculture department have a mission of promoting and protecting a given industry. Conflicts of interest occur when such missions are mixed, with the resultant "fox in the henhouse" syndrome. It is patently impossible to have a mission of consumer protection coupled with a mission of protecting and promoting a given industry or other special interest group: These situations do exist and continuously result in the public being defrauded instead of being protected.

Inasmuch as many environmental agencies have not fully developed the concept of a mission, these agencies have been ready prey for those businesses and industries which they are empowered to regulate. This has frequently resulted in the regulating agencies actually protecting or even promoting the interests of those they are charged with regulating.

Without clearly defined goals and missions, the public is being confused and defrauded. For example, consumers have every right to be indignant or worse, when they observe the U. S. Food and Drug Administration responding more to the desires of the food and drug industries than to the expressed needs of the consuming public.

The lack of clearly enunciated goals and missions has frequently led lawmakers to attempt to solve the problem by creating still another agency -- again, possibly without articulating the necessary goals and missions. Also, the lack of such agency goals and missions has been partially responsible for undesirable program fragmentation resulting in unnecessary confusion, controversy, ineffectiveness, duplication, and expenditure. Even policy-setting boards and commissions cannot properly function without the assignment of an overriding statement of direction and advocacy in terms of goals and missions. At still another level, program managers have every right to be confused and cannot do proper planning of objectives or management by objectives in the absence of assigned goals and missions.

Equally as onerous is the situation wherein an agency having a clear legal mandate of public service and consumer protection is saddled with a board or commission loaded with special interest groups, such as representatives of polluting industries. This poses another conflict of interest which defrauds and effectively disenfranchises the citizenry.

Even laws and regulations must be viewed with skepticism to determine if they are really designed to provide for rapid and equitable resolution of alleged violations, or if they are so couched in hazy definitions and procedural delays as to serve the purpose of protecting the polluter.

Another management concept worth understanding is that of program scope and program-problem relationships. A "program" may be defined as a rational grouping of methods or activities designed to solve one or more problems. An environmental "problem" may be defined as "a reasonably discrete environmental factor having an impact on man's health, safety, comfort, or well-being."

Program scope is usually defined by a governmental body such as the Congress, a legislature, a board, council or commission. However, in order to understand the value of and need for having major environmental health and environmental protection regulatory programs managed within a single agency, it is imperative to understand program-problem definitions and inter-relationships. Much of the recent environmental program fragmentation at federal, state, and local levels might have been prevented if

environmental program managers, citizens, and political leaders had a working concept of these relationships.

Another management component which demands understanding is that of program methodology. Program methods constitute programs and are simply specific methods of solving or abating one or more environmental problems. Historically, such methods tended to be rather narrow and limited in scope, and thereby in ineffectiveness. One method, namely, that of "inspection," was so frequently utilized almost to the exclusion of other methods, that many early-day environmental personnel were known and/or classified as "inspectors." To date, a veritable arsenal of program methods are known, authorized, utilized, and demanded by the public and our political leaders. These include public information, research, demonstration, inspection, sampling, laboratory identification and analyses, surveillance, education of target groups, environmental impact statements, coalitions with other environmental groups, economic and social incentives, warnings, hearings, permits, grading, compliance schedules, variances, injunctions, penalties, and administrative fines. Other methodology will, no doubt, be developed in direct relationship to the public demand for environmental quality.

Following the identification and development of program methods, it becomes logical to attempt to group these methods or activities into rational, effective programs. Perhaps innovative ideas in terms of program development are not always best accomplished by program personnel, inasmuch as such personnel tend to defend current efforts and patterns. In theory, planning groups external to the program process provide the best hope for improving program methodology. In practice, such groups as Comprehensive Health Planning and Councils on Environmental Quality, and other such specially anointed groups have really not faced up to the need.

In practice and in the real world as it continues to exist, programs are typically developed in a rather intuitive, irrational; short-sighted basis by a group of "experts" who usually have a case of "tunnelitis visionosis" at various levels of government. For example, let us consider a facility in which it is determined that problems of air pollution, water

pollution, solid wastes, environmental injuries, biological insults, environmental chemicals, food protection, radiation, noise pollution, and shelter exist or may exist. It was further determined that program methods such as inspection, sampling, surveillance, analyses, regulation, consultation, training, and design would be useful in attempting to solve the environmental problems in this facility. This grouping of program methods designed to solve the previously listed environmental problems became known as the Food Quality Program. But later, another group of "experts" determined that another type of facility had problems of air pollution, water pollution, solid wastes, environmental injuries, biological insults, environmental chemicals, food protection, radiation, noise pollution, and shelter. It was further determined that program methods such as inspection, sampling, surveillance, analyses, regulation, consultation, training and design would be useful in attempting to solve the environmental problems in this facility. This group of program methods designed to solve the previously listed environmental problems became known as the "Occupational Safety and Health Program."

At some other time and place, another group of experts determined that another type of facility again included exactly the same type of problems as previously listed, and suggested that these problems could be solved by the same type of program methods as previously listed; but this time the program was labeled "Institutional Environmental Control."

The differences between the previously listed program examples are not those of problems and methods, but rather those of priority or weight given the various problems within each facility. Therefore, it might be better if the labels were removed from all these programs, the programs combined into one, and that the program simply be labeled something like "Program A." Subsequently, the program manager is in the position of adjusting the emphasis given to the solution of the various problems in accordance with a method of determining priorities.

"Tools and resources" are such things as manpower, budgets, legislation, equipment and facilities which are necessary to effect programs. "Objectives" should

be stated in terms of a specified amount of change within a given time frame. For example, improving a food sanitation rating by 10% within one year, reducing the number or rate of tuberculosis cases by a given number within a given time frame, improving x miles of stream to meet stream standards within two years, etc.

The type and organizational location of this environmental agency is another matter. Historically, relatively narrow, single-purpose (i.e. health) environmental health programs were almost solely the province of health departments and the health profession at all levels of government. Public and political clamor and concern over the rapidly deteriorating environment in the late 1960s caused a widespread re-evaluation of environmental problems, program goals, program scope, program effectiveness, program support, environmental legislation, as well as program organization and institutional settings. Programs were shifted to new and/or different agencies for a variety of reasons -- some valid, and some questionable. Eager citizen environmentalists and citizen action groups sometimes confused change with progress. Public and environmental officials generally exhibited a high degree of territorial defense and a relatively low titer of organizational and program management knowledge. Powerful polluter lobbyists delighted in the opportunity to retard and confuse environmental management through repeated reorganizations and by placing environmental personnel and agencies in positions of greater "political responsiveness." The federal Environmental Protection Agency has been touted as a model for state environmental agencies, and this in turn has led to further undesirable program fragmentation in many states imbued with the desire to follow the federal "model".

There is no standard "model" to be followed, but perhaps there are some basic organizational principles to be considered when organizing environmental agencies at the state or local level. These include (1) organizational visibility, (2) programming on a multiple goal basis, (3) freedom of inter-agency communication and coordination, (4) operating with a mission of public service and consumer protection, (5) responsiveness to public sentiment, (6) ease of regulatory actions, (7) comprehensive programming, (8) legislation designed for rapid, equitable results instead of procedural delays, (9) line-item budgets for the environmental agency, (10) programmed for environmental protection

rather than environmental utilization and development, and (11) regulations and standards promulgated by a board or commission representing balanced public interests.

The foregoing principles may be attained in a variety of organizational arrangements ranging from an appropriate environmental agency within a health department, to a separate, free-standing environmental agency or department. In any case, however, adherence to the foregoing principles is necessary if there is to be an effective environmental protection effort.

And finally, a few notes about the problem of "manpower." Totemism in the utilization and assignment of manpower has been particularly well-developed in the health and environmental program areas. We have continued to practice totemism by assuming that a physician, an engineer, an environmentalist, or a scientist automatically has the talents necessary to effectively engage in specific program activities. In some cases, I am convinced that professionals are not being utilized effectively or in consonance with their talents and professional levels. In many cases, we are specifying a given type of professional based on one to five percent of the program requirements, rather than on the 95 to 99 percent of the program requirements which might indicate a different type of employee. This problem of effectively utilizing and addressing manpower to program needs deserves all of our continuing attention in an effort to solve problems most effectively and get the most out of our budget dollars.

When one grasps the magnitude and scope of environmental problems, understands their vital importance to this and future generations, scans the maze of organizational arrangements for delivering programs, and views the variety of useful program methods, it becomes obvious that the scope of environmental manpower required is as broad as the environment. Such manpower necessitates educational achievements through a spectrum from the lowest assistant or inspector through the various types of doctoral level environmentalists. Truly, the environmental programs demand an alliance of physical scientists, life scientists, social scientists, engineers, planners, technicians, laboratory scientists, veterinarians, physicians -- the list is endless, and all types are necessary.

Traditionally, environmental programs were erroneously thought to be (and perhaps were) the province of engineers, with other professions such as "sanitarians" playing an

ancillary and subordinate role: This manpower concept is now known to be inappropriate and archaic. The mantle of environmental program leadership now falls to those who earn it, be they the "doctors, lawyers, or Indian chiefs."