

Robertson faces. The city's sheer size, geographic spread, plus varied terrain create a highly demanding situation for directing road maintenance. Third and fourth, "physical and social technologies": much of Robertson's role entails the application of physical and social technologies for successfully organizing human and financial resources in order to solve the day-to-day problems of street maintenance. The case illustrates well the manifold, innovative technologies Robertson regularly employs to promote service delivery efficiency and effectiveness. Fifth, "wishes and ideas": Robertson is depicted here as "the man in the middle" of immense, often conflicting, pressures. His office daily confronts these intense, diverse demands, or "wishes and ideas," not only from the many publics or stakeholders it serves, but also from within bureaucracy, Robertson's subordinates, as well as from above, from politically elected officials, members of the county board of supervisors. Sixth, "catastrophe": a major aspect of his job is defined by how well he can cope with sudden crises, the big, unplanned events that make the evening TV news or morning newspaper headlines. Robertson's responses to unforeseen catastrophes are depicted throughout this case and highlight the importance of an administrator's special gifts at promptly, creatively, and efficaciously confronting such major challenges when they arise. Finally and possibly most vital, "personality": Robertson's determined hard work, ethical judgment, deep sense of responsibility, feel for the community, capacity to work with people from widely different backgrounds, comprehension of their shifting, often elusive, political priorities and needs stand out through the following narrative. Where he learned these remarkable administrative talents and how he honed their pragmatic on-the-job application involving the broad range of daily problems that land on his desk for resolution are explored thoughtfully and insightfully by the authors.

However, this story not only illustrates each of Gaus's seven ecological factors, but it also takes an additional important step forward by advancing a theory, or an improved way of understanding, related to why Robertson so effectively responds to the administrative environment. Drawing upon the Arnstein Ladder of Participation, the authors suggest that Robertson's job can best be envisioned as a circle of continuous relationships among citizens, employees, elected officials, and key stakeholders. At the end they underscore seminal lessons about how Robertson so successfully interacts with these groups and individuals within complicated, rapidly changing circumstances. As the authors conclude, "Based on our interviews and observations, Robertson does not treat any single stakeholder group with a single strategy. Rather, across stakeholders he relies on the entire toolbox of strategies to achieve his desired outcomes of technically superior and responsive service delivery."

As you read Cooper and Bryer's careful analysis of William Robertson, try to reflect on what their case tells us about such issues as:

What is the Arnstein Ladder of Participation? How does it help us understand the way an administrator responds effectively to the key factors of the administrative environment as described by John Gaus?

How did Robertson's background prepare him for this line of work? Was it formal education or on-the-job experience that best shaped his skills for being a public administrator? Can his talents be applied equally well to other kinds of public service jobs? Would Robertson, in your view, perform as well if he was assigned to run other major administrative departments? Why or why not?

What stakeholders were most critical to ensure Robertson's success? How did he identify them? Respond to their needs and demands? Partner with them to develop common strategies?

Unlike business where "the bottom line" often guides the determination of whether or not a CEO is a success or failure, what criteria are used to evaluate Robertson's success or failure? Why is the work of public officials, like William Robertson, more difficult to assess than the work of officials in the private sector?

This test achievement and certification gave him the knowledge and technical requirements to serve effectively as an emerging leader in the bureau. In combination with his military service, which Robertson has described as his college experience, he began his rapid advancement without formal university education.

Robertson's advancement put him in a variety of positions with different responsibilities, including participation in an effort to reorganize the bureau, which coincided with discussion of the neighborhood council system in 1998. He ultimately rose to become assistant director of the bureau under the directorship of Greg Scott. After Scott's retirement, a new director was named but retired quickly as a result of health concerns, and Robertson was subsequently promoted to director. This last advancement was awarded to Robertson because of his proven ability to get the job done, work with competing interests, and satisfy multiple needs. One informant reported that he had been impressed with Robertson's rise through the ranks and the way he had proven himself along the way. Thus, no national search was conducted for the director's position when Robertson was there with all the necessary skills. In all, Robertson went from heavy-duty truck operator to bureau director in 18 years. According to Robertson, "People wait this long to become supervisor."

Robertson's leadership continues to be recognized today. In 2006, he was elected president of the City of Los Angeles' General Manager's Association Chosen by peers who head other departments in the city, Robertson hopes to use his two-year term to break down walls between departments and to focus on solving the city's problems collaboratively.

Politics with Integrity: The Circle of Participation

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969) depicts the way in which citizen participation was typically framed during the 1960s: as a zero-sum power struggle between government and citizens. Providing more participation was viewed as empowering the people at the expense of administrative and political power. As one moves up the ladder from manipulation at the bottom to citizen control at the top, citizens gain increasing increments of power as government gives it up. From an administrative perspective, the dominance of efficiency and technical skill gives way to citizen discretion.

We suggest revising Arnstein's ladder to more appropriately reflect the movement toward the concepts of collaborative governance and management by turning the vertical ladder into a circle. From the perspective of collaboration, encouraging citizen participation in the public management process is not a zero-sum but a positive-sum game. A public executive such as Robertson can gain power by working with instead of against the citizenry. Through collaboration, citizens can introduce their particular knowledge and skills into the work of managing the delivery of public services. The public executive is in a key position to encourage this kind of collaboration by employing the approaches reflected in the steps of the circle of participation.

By further conceptualizing the ladder as a circle, we can visualize an administrator standing not on a rung of the ladder trying to work with citizens, employees, elected officials, and other stakeholders through a single approach, but rather on a platform at the center of the loop. From here, the administrator can easily combine strategies, such as manipulation and citizen control, and move quickly from one strategy to another depending on the needs of a situation. Figure 3.1 illustrates the circle of participation.

The stories recounted here show how Robertson has employed these approaches to produce technically

Figure 3.1 Combining Strategies in the Circle of Participation

