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Book Review

**Len Garis, Colette Squires and Darryl Plecas,
The Essentials of Leadership in Government: Understanding the
Basics, Len Garis, University of the Fraser Valley, 2018,
Pages: 142, Price: \$28.85,
ISBN: 978-1791502188**

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Though leadership is not a fresh theme for a dialogue in the field of management at present, the three authors, Garis, Squires, and Plecas present a new model of attributes of good leaders in government which is badly needed in contemporary societies. Public or civil service is a strong and prominent sector in most nations thus, effective leadership for government organisations is a must. This book provides a full coverage of the essential behaviours, aims, skills, and commitments of a good public leader. The book commences with an introduction that is articulated to provide the definition and the purpose of leadership while identifying the attributes of good leaders and the distinguishable characteristics of government. Then it continues to present the model “BASICS” presenting the seven attributes of a good leader. The book ends with an appendix with a 360° tool for leader assessment and a list of references.

Interestingly, the authors highlight the ‘human’ aspect of leadership by stating that “leadership is about relationships”. They define leadership as “about aligning people with the vision, inspiring them, motivating them, and providing effective communication” (p. 11). They explicitly proclaim that this book is for ‘government workers and civil servants’ in which

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‘government employees at any level who have a lead role in the delivery of government programmes, products, and services’ could include. Their discussion turns to ‘good leaders’ in the ‘government’ where authors attribute credibility, consistency, and sustainable buy-in as characteristics of good leaders in a broader sense, while distinguishing the specialities of the leaders in government as to the obligation to work, respect, and honour the public interest, work with a sense of social responsibility, non-partisanship, a heightened sense of good citizenship, and not be driven and motivated by self-interest. This introductory section elevates the grounds for their thesis which concretely presents six attributes of a good leader in government, i.e., behaviour, aspirations, skills, information commitments, communication commitments, and sustainability commitments (abbreviated to denote BASICS), guided by an inner core: character, integrity, ethics, and values. Thus, the eight chapters are set to elaborate on each attribute of the BASIC model and the inner core.

At the outset, chapter one discusses the inner core of a good leader with a brief on the accountable and responsible nature of the job of a civil servant in the government. The authors declare the inner core as the ‘heart and mind’ of the leader on which the entire behaviour is based. They elucidate the inner core in light of values, ethical conduct, moral framework, honesty, and integrity where they visualise a leader as socially responsible, ethically functioning, and caring for all stakeholders around them. They opine that good leaders in government are expected to respect, inspire, and empower others.

The authors present the essential behaviours of good leaders in chapter two. Founding on the inner core, the behaviours of good leaders in government are described as fostering genuine collaboration, demonstrating genuine concern for people, investing in people, demonstrating commitment to getting results, having a vision, encouraging innovation, and leading with courage. Almost all of these behaviours have been already discussed in many past theories of leadership, however, the current authors have put them in a different model to highlight the behaviour of leaders in the context of government.

Chapter three is about aspirations of good leaders i.e., what they aim to achieve as leaders. Again, based on the (individual) inner core, the authors argue that good leaders aim to achieve win-win outcomes, inspire and motivate others, strive for excellence, be optimistic and positive, realistic and thoughtfully sceptical, and dedicated and committed. Thus, the authors create an expectation that the ethical conduct, moral values, and beliefs of a good leader in government would create a (positive) work culture that leads to his/her success.

In chapter four, the authors discuss the skills of a good leader. They propose a broad set of skills including oral and written communication, active listening and conflict management skills, coaching and mentoring skills, team building, evaluating performance and providing feedback, strategic thinking, problem solving and decision making, personal organisation, and resource and financial management. Even though some of these skills have been widely and repeatedly highlighted in leadership literature, this chapter has put them all together and related to the ‘inner core’ or the value set of good leaders. This is a well elaborated chapter with additionally related information provided in the form of tables.

Chapter five focuses on the information commitment of a good leader. 'Information' has been identified as a critical resource for leaders in the past research, especially for effective and timely decision making. However, this chapter importantly highlights the fact that a leader's information commitment flows in four different directions, i.e., internal (related to their own performance and weaknesses), interpersonal (concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders), operational (related to work content), and external (world events and trends) which set a 360° coverage.

Communications commitment is the focus of the chapter six where the authors give prominence to the commitment of a leader to communicate gratitude and appreciation, the need for open and transparent communication, establishing accessible and easy communication systems, consultation and active listening, and information sharing with necessary parties. This is an inevitable aspect in this subject matter as the information and communication need of public servants plays a significant role in their job, and lack of sufficient information commitment of leaders in government could possibly create confusion and dissatisfaction among all stakeholders around.

Sustainability commitment is the point of discussion in chapter seven. The chapter commences with a brief introduction to the concept of sustainability in the government service. The authors emphasise the sustainability aspect on the grounds that public service is obliged to ensure sustainability socially, fiscally, and environmentally. They identify the sustainability commitment of leaders in two streams; human sustainability (dignity and respect, positive relationships, self-development of people, and workplace health and wellness) and operational sustainability (strengthening corporate image, innovations and change, continuous improvements, and fiscal and environmental sustainability). It finally presents the seven principles of sustainable leadership.

The last chapter, chapter eight draws the attention of the reader on how to develop the inner core and the rest of the attributes needed for a good leader in government. In that, the authors discuss about 360° tools that employees and other parties can use to assess certain attributes of their leaders and provide feedback for their development. Thus, this chapter narrates on 'leadership development' by highlighting on educating and developing leaders, points to be considered in leadership training, and selecting leaders.

The book is enriched with some appreciable features such as diagrams and tables at certain places, quotes to highlight certain points in the text, appropriately identified sub-headings, and footnotes for references. All chapters end with a summary. The book is written in simple language and with clarity in its communication. It would be better if tables were identified with serial numbers. Further, it would be more beneficial if each chapter starts with a simple outline of learning points for the reader. This is suggestible as a single chapter covers a wide scope with a vast area of knowledge. Interestingly, the framework of this book does not draw from or built on any existing leadership theory despite the existence of a variety of leadership theories. However, it seemingly covers the traits, skills, behaviours, styles and attributes of leaders discussed in many different theories.

In all, the main contribution of the authors has been delivered in the form of a simple model to understand and apply leadership in government organisations and also the 360° tool to assess the leader over seven attributes suggested in the book. Even though the book cannot be treated as a textbook for teaching leadership in organisations, it is exemplarily recommendable to people in leadership positions, especially in civil service, to read and reflect on what is expected from the leaders of a public sector (government) organisation. In addition to this, the book is a wonderful reading for policy makers, politicians, academicians, entrepreneurs, business people in the corporates, and the general public.