Notes from a Reflective Practitioner of Innovation

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Part 1 of 4

Many of the questions about innovation are posed from the outside looking in: How can society get more innovation? How can a good innovation be differentiated from a poor one? How important should innovation be as a public value? This chapter is an attempt to answer a question posed by those on the inside looking out: What can managers do to foster innovation? How can they create organizational climates in which innovation can flourish? On this inside-out question, I offer the experiential perspective of the manager who has struggled to innovate and to create the conditions under which others could innovate.

Reflections

For years, before I knew it was a term of art, I was called a reflective practitioner. To me, this meant that, in contrast to the practitioner who told war stories about his triumphs and defeats, I was someone who enjoyed thinking about my work at some distance and trying to abstract lessons for myself as well as for others. This tendency to reflect was clearly useful, but I have only recently come to try to articulate more precisely what it means so that I could develop the capacity in others,

Donald A. Schön, a consultant and Massachusetts Institute of Technology social scientist, has written definitively on the reflective practitioner. In The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, Schön offers what he calls an "epistemology of practice" based on a close analysis of what practitioners do as they "reflect-in-action," In Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions, he offers guidance to those in the business of educating practitioners. Schön describes, in somewhat complex terms, his ideas about the "art" of professional practice and how and to what extent professionals think about what they know.

The concept of reflective practice has much to do with theories, developed over the years, on learning in general. James Coleman, a sociologist in the fields of learning and education, describes experiential learning as inductive, where one goes from the particular to the general. In inductive learning, the sequence would begin with "action in
a particular situation and the observance of the effects of that action, move to the understanding of these effects in a particular instance, then to understanding the general principle, and finally to application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization." Another learning theorist, David Kolb, has also described experiential learning as a four-stage process: (1) concrete experience, (2) observations and reflections, (3) formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and (4) testing applications of concepts in new situations.

These frameworks should help locate the contribution of practitioners and suggest goals toward which "reflective" practitioners might aim: generalizable observations grounded in the concrete that meet the test of applicability in new situations. The days are gone when any good story from a well-respected manager was considered useful (or when an academic could credibly spin theory not located in practice). Reflective practice can be understood as the ability to form abstract principles based on practitioners' observations of their own concrete experiences and offer those observations for testing by others.

Thus I offer the reflections of one manager who attempted to innovate and to set the stage for the innovations of others. The organization in which these observations are grounded is the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), where I served as commissioner from 1983 to 1990.

**Department of Juvenile Justice: 1983-90**

In 1983 DJJ was a city agency like many others. Its mission was not clear; it had responsibility for only a piece of the system of which it was a part; its staff was not working to its potential; its reputation was weak; and it had just lost a major political battle. In 1978 a mayoral task force had described Spofford Juvenile Detention Center, DJJ's major secure-detention facility, as a "case history in failure." Staff turnover was high, among both the line workers and top management: In twenty-nine years, Spofford had twenty-two directors.

In 1979 Mayor Edward I. Koch created DJJ as a separate agency, pulling its functions out of the Human Resources Administration, a much larger, superagency, created by John Lindsay when he was mayor. DJJ was charged with responsibility for pretrial detention and aftercare services for children under sixteen who had been arrested and were awaiting disposition of their cases.

In 1983 Mayor Koch appointed me commissioner of DJJ, and I embarked on an effort to transform the agency. To this task, I brought more commitment than experience. I had been a Legal Aid lawyer and had worked for the city in an oversight agency, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Criminal Justice. Before moving to DJJ, I served for three years as deputy commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction, with responsibility for the implementation of programs and the oversight of compliance with federal court consent decrees on conditions in the city's jails. That job taught me the difference between announcing a policy and having line staff carry it out consistently. Mostly, however, it filled me with examples of the hazards of bureaucratic management.
Other than three weeks at the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government, I had little exposure to or understanding of what it took to transform a public agency.

My DJJ journey was a long but infinitely interesting one--with stops and starts, missteps and mistakes--as well as one graced with extraordinary help along the way. And I had the good fortune to attract a committed group of fellow-travelers, one of whom succeeded me and served for four years as commissioner.

Over a ten-year stretch, the agency reinvented itself. DJJ redefined its mission to encompass both custody and care, and then prevention. It created a case-management program for juveniles in detention. It developed a community-based aftercare component to follow kids released from detention home. These two programs made DJJ a 1986 winner in the Ford Foundation and John F. Kennedy School of Government Awards Program for Innovations in State and Local Government. To New York City from Washington state, DJJ brought Homebuilders, a new way of serving families both intensively and preventively; adapted the program to work with families of children in the juvenile justice system; and seeded the effort to have that technology become part of New York state and New York City's systems of serving families. DJJ reinvigorated existing staff and attracted talented new staff. It stanched the flow of staff leaving and turned around the pattern at the top; DJJ became distinguished for the number of people who stayed for the long term. Finally, the challenge that resulted in the demise of the agency's previous administration was met: In 1989 the last approval necessary was achieved for the physical replacement of Spofford; ground breaking began for two new smaller facilities in 1992, and occupancy is scheduled for 1998. In 1989 DJJ was featured in the Tom Peters's PBS documentary on Excellence in the Public Sector. And in 1992 it was selected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as one of five sites for participation in a national juvenile detention initiative.

The reflective lessons from this journey are rich and varied. Those offered here concern the process of organizational transformation. In a study of organizational transition, consultants Richard Beckhard and Reuben Harris identify three stages: (1) articulating a vision for the future, (2) diagnosing the present, and (3) managing the transition from here to there. At this last stage, the lessons of DJJ are most likely to be applicable to others.

From this DJJ experience, I can extract lessons that address three fundamental tasks facing any public manager, particularly one trying to be innovative:

- How to manage the work of the staff, which I call "Front Line";
- How to structure the work of the organization, which I call "Main Line"; and
- How to deal with a more sophisticated and difficult set of dynamic issues, which I call "Over the Line."
Front Line

Very quickly, the executive staff at DJJ learned that the staff was a great untapped resource. When asked to tell their story, staff frequently explained that they were once "a kid in trouble," that some adult had helped them, and that they wanted to be that adult for another generation of kids in trouble. DJJ's line staff took their jobs because they cared about kids. My task and that of my executive staff was to reconfigure the organization so it could support, instead of block, the staff's work. In attempting to do that, we learned the following lessons:

Support Your Staff. In any service agency, whether in the public or private sector, staff are likely to treat the clients or customers as they believe themselves to be treated. Staff who are treated harshly will, in all likelihood, turn around and impose that harshness on the people over whom they have some power--the clients or customers. Staff who believe that their basic needs are not being met are less likely to work hard to meet the needs of children in their care. We realized that, if we wanted staff to nurture the children in DJJ's care, we could not mandate it; the only way we were going to get there was to make the staff feel nurtured themselves. We looked for opportunities to acknowledge the difficulty of the work that staff was asked to do and sought to catch staff doing things right.

A sad illustration of the depth of our staff's neediness came early in my tenure at the holiday season. A famous local celebrity had a custom of giving children in institutions a goody bag with a scarf or mittens, an apple, and a box of raisins. When DJJ's staff was asked by the celebrity's organization how many children were in detention, they doubled the number so as to include themselves.

Managers whose goal is to change the way clients are dealt with have to work through staff on the line. The underappreciated tool here is the reverberations that flow almost inevitably from the way staff themselves are treated. Staff magnify and pass on what they receive from the people who manage them. This truism seems too often missed in public life as managers are quick to blame and punish staff and then wonder at the abuse staff devolve onto clients.

A caveat belongs here. My "pass-along theory"--if managers support and nurture staff, staff will be more likely to support and nurture kids--is premised on the notion that it is hard to give what you do not get, that staff will not be as likely to give nurturing if they do not get nurturing. This seems true in my experience. Top management, however, may have to solve this problem for themselves. Leadership means, among other things, figuring out how to give to managers and staff the support and attention they need. Leadership means doing this even if leaders do not receive that same support and attention from their own superiors, be that the office of an elected official, such as the mayor, or an appointed executive, such as a cabinet secretary.

An illustration might help. DJJ was often ignored as an agency. In New York City terms, it was small. It dealt with issues that, in the absence of scandal, did not command attention. And it had no major outside constituency. Mayor Koch was known for a focus
on himself ("How am I doing?"). Even after DJJ won the Innovations award and received other significant national recognition, we received little attention or support from the mayor. We had to invent our own sources of support, help here can come from peers in other agencies, from colleagues in similar roles, or from any other group the leader relies on. I had an understanding husband; a close group of friends, some of them in city government; and a set of colleagues both practitioner and academic I had developed through my Kennedy School connections (the executive programs and the Innovations network). I also had ongoing relationships with outside consultants who helped me keep perspective and served as safe sounding boards. Each of the executive staff coped differently, but we each relied on others for some sense of support.

Our general counsel, for example, who played a complex and important role at DJJ, created her own group of general counsels of small city agencies. They met monthly at each others' offices over a brown bag lunch and talked about the role dilemmas they shared.

Whether such support from the top exists, has to be supplemented or finessed, or the equivalent invented wholecloth, leaders need to keep in mind the critical importance of finding ways to attend to staff. This is particularly true in the public sector, where other incentives are less available.

Chunk the Work. The expectations of public sector service agencies are enormous and potentially overwhelming. For example, telling staff that their responsibility is to eliminate juvenile delinquency, even for a limited group of clients, is to invite chaos or collapse. The task is just too overwhelming. Thus the manager has the responsibility to organize the work so that staff have clear, reachable milestones--specific objectives that can be identified and achieved.

In the Aftercare program, which provided services on a voluntary basis to children released home from detention, the needs of the families served were both deep and wide. So we narrowed the task and defined a clear goal: returning children to school. Work that helped achieve that aim was on target. Work that went beyond those boundaries was not encouraged. So, if a client was not going to school because he or she was kept home to babysit a younger sibling, getting day care for the younger child was within the scope of appropriate work. Without that specific connection, however, getting siblings into day care would have been nice but not useful. With clear objectives set by management, staff can more easily manage and organize the overwhelming demands from their clients.

By selecting a concrete and available goal and "chunking" the work into doable pieces, agency leaders make success both clearer and nearer. And they create opportunities for staff to get recognized for their work and accomplishments.

Celebrate Small Wins. Karl E. Weick of Cornell developed the notion of celebrating small wins in an article called "Small Wins: Redesigning the Scale of Social Problems." Arguing that the "massive scale on which social problems are conceived" deters
innovation, he suggested that reformulating broad social issues as "mere problems" allows for a series of "small wins" that can be built into a pattern of effective action.

Weick's article, which a consultant brought to our attention approximately a year into our effort, inspired the ideas of chunking the work and focusing constant attention on the need to recognize and celebrate small wins. To us, this meant everything from celebrating the day more children were enrolled in Aftercare than in detention (a long-held dream) to taking the fiscal staff out to dessert when the bills were paid on time for three months in a row. We had a party (cookies in the shape of buses) when the new vans to transport children to court were delivered (staff had worked on the specs for those vans). We had another when we opened a separate intake facility as a first step in bringing case management to our network of group homes.

In general, we looked constantly to find people doing something right and then created opportunities to acknowledge their work.

Create Appropriate Forums. In the public sector, satisfactory work is not generally a solitary experience. We learned early on that everyone needs a group at work: Everyone needs not only to feel part of some larger effort but also to have the opportunity to meet and talk regularly with others doing related work. We learned that creating groups that work in the organization's interest is critically important. Left on their own, staff will invent their own informal groups, which are much less likely to be working in the organization's interest. Some staff in one unit, for example, were unhappy with the decision to establish a group home for intake in the nonsecure detention program. They began to attract others to their informal group of disgruntled employees, and the unhappiness began to spread. When we included some of the original people who had opposed the decision in the work group to establish plans for the intake house, their complaints got aired in a setting where they could be directly addressed, and the energy previously directed to complaining shifted into more productive discussions of how to resolve real differences.

Leaders need to inventory what groups, both formal and informal, exist: standing meetings, task forces, special ad hoc committees. Much can be learned from seeing what is in place and where the gaps are.

Over time, and at least annually, we checked to see that, given the organization's current needs and state of development, the existing forums made sense. And we did not hesitate to end or redesign those that were no longer useful or to create new ones.

For example, we had an ongoing and useful weekly executive staff meeting that consisted of my five direct reports and myself. In addition, I led a monthly senior-management staff meeting with three levels of staff and about fifteen people; this meeting was deadly boring and generally ineffective. Little new thinking emerged, and few concrete issues got raised or resolved. When I removed myself from the senior management staff meeting and turned leadership over to the remaining members of the executive staff, the meeting improved greatly and much more was accomplished. With this new arrangement,
the staff who worked two levels down no longer had the urge or opportunity to bypass their boss and try out their ideas directly on me. Moreover, as the authority of the executive staff was reinforced, their stature grew.

Another example of rethinking our organizational structure was the creation of a wider management staff meeting. We wanted all those who had any supervisory role—even those who, because of civil service regulations or budget and personnel policies, did not have managerial titles—to think of themselves as managers and to identify with the agency as a whole. Our goal was to encourage the staff's identification with the agency's mission and goals and to maximize the potential of those already on board.

Put Energy into Hiring. More discretion is available in the public sector for hiring and firing than executives use to advantage. Leaders need to view hiring—and selective firing—more strategically. These aspects of leadership are significant and too often overlooked.

We used the need to fill major vacancies as an opportunity to rethink where we were going. We were careful not to assume we needed to replace whoever had left. Instead, we thought hard about where we were organizationally and where we were going, so the person we hired would fit the future not the past.11 We were lucky enough to have an executive search firm, then Isaacson Ford-Webb and Miller, now Isaacson and Miller, working on our behalf.12 The early search for a new director of Spofford, the secure detention facility, offered the opportunity to learn what was for us a new approach to hiring.13 We learned to scope the job, talking to internal and external stakeholders to develop a sense of the short- and long-term tasks of the job and then the qualities necessary to accomplish all this. Then we learned to think creatively about the kinds of places in which such people might be found. All this forced us to focus tightly on what we hoped to accomplish and how we intended to work together.

In interviewing candidates, we learned to solicit what could be called "work biographies." We learned to look backward—to peoples' experience—to find those who had risked, failed, learned, and gone on. We found that how people have dealt with challenges in their past was the best indicator of how they would handle the inevitable challenges and the inevitable failures at DJJ. Particularly when looking for managers, we looked for people with what executive search consultant John Isaacson calls hunger, speed, and weight:

- Hunger can be understood as drive, that internal connection between a person's self esteem and accomplishment at work, that self-regulated push to excel, to succeed, to prevail.
- Speed is the ability to juggle many things at once, to master large quantities of new material quickly, and to pick out the important from the trivial or irrelevant.
- Weight is the ability to handle authority fairly, with maturity, and to tell the truth up (to the boss), down (to subordinates), and sideways (to peers).

We took our hiring interviews seriously, often having someone go through multiple interviews. Just as we initially had carefully analyzed or scoped the job, we paid attention
to reference checks, a task too often done so perfunctorily as to be meaningless. Learning something from reference checks involves going beyond the usual, two-minute conversation; it means developing a clear sense of what you think you know about the candidate and testing that out on the person with whom you are talking. It also means saying what you think you do not know and asking for specific examples that will help fill in the parts about which you are unclear. Good reference checking also involves going beyond a list and speaking to people "up, down, and sideways"—people to whom the candidate reported, people he or she managed, and peers. We made mistakes in hiring, as does everyone, but we were much less often surprised by what unraveled. Moreover, this process helped us find and attract people of great talent.

Main Line

Regrettably, no blueprints are available for organizational change. Like unhappy families, each managerial situation is different. And yet as in families, some structural decisions can add value and increase the chances of success. What follows is our contribution to the lore of effective organizational structure.

Develop a Long-Term Strategy While You Manage the Short-Term Crises. The demands of the immediate crises can easily drive out any long-term thinking or planning. Consequently, any public manager who wishes to succeed and to effect significant innovation must develop the capacity to build a long-term strategic agenda while simultaneously managing the short-term crises. Do not wait until the short-term crises are resolved.

Public agencies crash on this shoal all too often. We public sector managers assume office with our eyes and our hopes on the future but tell ourselves we first need to attend to the present. A constant and unrelenting focus on the crises of the present will yield, at best, short-lived gains.

At DJJ, we found ourselves too easily falling into this trap. Thus we decided that the way for us to focus our own attention on the future was to create a group and then a schedule of meetings. We invented the "strategy group" whose task it was to decide where we were going with our mission of custody and care and then how we were doing getting there. In monthly meetings, over the space of a year, the strategy group developed the theme of case management. When the direction setting was sufficiently clear, the group disbanded and the responsibility for implementation was put with the line managers.

When we waited until we had time to deal with the long-term, we did not get to it. When we created a mechanism to force ourselves to focus on the future, the effort was worth the pain. The success we saw in the seven years, and since, very much stands on the early, creative, and thematic work of that strategy group.

Change the Culture. Before a leader can attempt to change the organization's culture, she or he needs to understand the existing culture. What are the organization's basic assumptions? What behaviors do people assume, count on, and accept? What underlies
why people act the way they do? Only once the leadership understands the existing culture can it develop a vision of the new culture and create new artifacts to exemplify it.

For our central office, this meant everything from expecting excellence, to starting meetings on time, to having nice offices. Each of these shifts involved a struggle. Each began with an understanding of the role the original aspects of the culture played and an effort to devise a strategy that would help move people in a new direction. Some things were reasonably straightforward. I was aggravated by meetings that started late--by the time wasted and the acting out displayed by people who arrived late knowing that nothing began until everyone was there. Convinced that it would work better for all involved, I began and ended all my meetings as scheduled even if everyone was not there to start. Soon, people started showing up on time.

Setting a standard of excellence included sending written work back until it was right. I remember an early bar chart that a staff person prepared for a city council hearing. The length of the bars bore no resemblance to the size of the corresponding numbers. I sent it back. I kept returning work until it was right.

At the most significant level of culture change, we had to act revitalized before we were. Early on, for instance, we had to act as if we were certain we could find a solution to the stalemate around the replacement of Spofford even when we had no clue whether that was so or what the eventual solution might be. Like much else asked of leaders who aspire to be innovative, this required a great leap of faith, fueled by arrogance perhaps, and best tempered by humility. We had to hold the future as real as we struggled to overcome the difficulties of the present. We needed to believe we could make a difference before we could do so. We had to convince others of our capacity before we were completely confident in it ourselves.

Get Help When You Need It. Good leadership means acknowledging what you know and what you do not--what you can do and what you cannot. Leaders need to hire people who are better at what they have to do than the leader would be. And they have to get the right kind of help from outside their organization.

We used this help early and often. We found the outside perspective that consultants brought very valuable, but we learned the hard way not to over-rely on consultants. We found out that we needed to manage the consultants’ work, that the end product was only as good as the thinking we contributed up front. To improve the timeliness of the arrival of children in court, we asked one consultant to develop new schedules for DJJ buses. But the effort floundered at the first handoff to the consultant because we relied too much on what we thought was his generic expertise and failed to ground his work in the specifics of our needs and issues.

Learning the hard way about consultants meant once having a meeting in which more consultants were in the room than DJJ staff. It also meant being disappointed at first when we realized we could not shift responsibility for developing the long-term agenda to a consultant (who was smart enough not to be seduced into overfunctioning).
Plan From Both the Top Down and the Bottom Up. Once you sort out what work belongs to internal staff and where consultants can be helpful, the trick is to get decisions made at the right level. Policy decisions that involve awareness of the whole organization and the outside boundary generally need to be made at the top. Implementation decisions can often best be made by those involved in carrying out the actions.

At DJJ, the executive staff was responsible for the major policy decisions; for example, the decision to implement case management or to develop a family-based alternative to detention. We got input from others. But we never suggested these policy decisions were democratic. In fact, we had staff who made it clear that they disagreed with our policy, and we made it equally clear that we were proceeding.

As we moved to implement any policy decision, however, we made sure that the planning involved the line staff. For example, when we set up the case-management system, the line staff involved in doing the case conferences decided how often they were to be held, who was to be included, and what information was to be gathered.

Face Mistakes and Fix Them. Facing and fixing mistakes is tough in the public sector, where they are less easily tolerated. We managed by starting new efforts small. We believed that this approach offered a more protected space in which to experiment and to learn from our early efforts.

Small is a relative concept. You are looking for whatever size effort allows for a "dynamic interaction between the innovation and the organization that maximizes the chance of learning as the new program unfolds and of having learning influence the ongoing conceptual design. The scale is small enough when [you] can hold the conceptual and the operational close at hand and manage the interplay to the benefit of both." By working to get it right first, a manager can see gaps in the original design and thinking. This approach offers the manager the opportunity to get the program on a sound basis and document results before having to argue for more resources or for expansion.

Pick Fights Carefully. We fought hard on selected issues and won. If you pick your early issues with care, you are likely to care more about them than the people on the other side and that will help you prevail. We were determined to get the city's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to pick up funding for Aftercare, which began with a federal grant. Appeals to OMB's sense of what was right were getting us nowhere. Deputy Commissioner for Planning and Program Development Kathleen Feely invented a brilliant if far-fetched argument that Aftercare, by returning children to school, would allow the city to claim more state dollars in school funding because the city's claim was tied to school attendance. OMB was won over, perhaps as much by the lengths to which we were prepared to go as by the few dollars possibly gained. The point is we established ourselves as an agency always prepared, very determined, and incredibly insistent.
Once you win a few fights, people are less likely to take you on. This is particularly useful advice with oversight or support agencies in the public sector. Budget staff have many potential places to look for cuts. If they believe you are likely to appeal their decisions and win, they may think twice before they push hard.

Create Opportunities. We did not wait to be asked to invent. We moved ahead and took risks. No one suggested that we find ways to work effectively with the families of children in our custody. It was our conclusion based on our work with clients, and we authorized ourselves to move ahead. We decided to bring the Homebuilders program to New York. And then we decided to do so in a way that encouraged the city agency with overall responsibility for funding preventive services programs to learn about Homebuilders and consider its usefulness citywide.

Much can be said for clear mandates or direct authorization of work, or for the notion that it is the citizens, or the elected officials who speak for them, who set the parameters of legitimate action. Certainly, much has been written about the legitimate sources of executive action.\textsuperscript{18} It is not that we considered those theories and rejected them. Instead, we just moved ahead, being as careful as we knew how to keep our various overseers and involved publics informed. We moved ahead as we figured out where we wanted to go and how we might get there.

**Over the Line**

Over time, a leader and an organization can establish a sense of trust and teamwork and a willingness to take risks. This takes years, not weeks or months, and a commitment of self to work that goes beyond the ordinary. The payoff, though, also extends beyond the ordinary; the result is an organization that fosters both learning and achievement. When well done, that is an extraordinary combination. But even this achievement brings its own, more subtle challenges, which require more subtle strategies.

Learn to Acknowledge What is Hard to Acknowledge: People's Feelings. The personal situations created by work are often painful. And group life is often irrational. But these problems can neither be dismissed or ignored. The leader must deal with them openly and explicitly.

Competition, for example, is ever-present in group life and drives some behavior, some to the good (more work gets accomplished) but some to the detriment of the task at hand. When competition was in the air, I could always tell because the "buzz" in my ear increased with a big jump in the frequency with which executive staff members would come in to report on their colleagues. At the next executive staff meeting, I would bring up this observation, and we would attempt to address whatever was making people feel particularly competitive.

Generally, the executive staff as a group found that our work was helped by creating opportunities to acknowledge and deal with our feelings. Irrational feelings are present at work and in group life everywhere. We found that allowing for their expression and
working with these feelings, while difficult, made our work richer and more effective. Not facing the irrational does not make it disappear and eventually blocks effective work.

Resistance to change is often described as just such an irrational feeling and attributed to the other. Our executive staff approached this issue as we did all issues, by first trying to understand our own resistance to change. As we explored what we feared we had to lose, we began to understand the feeling in others. Resistance to change became discussable, not taboo. People in the organization could voice their own concerns and together solutions could be found, even to what was first expressed irrationally.

For example, people worried about the move of our central office staff from near Wall Street to less than a mile uptown, above City Hall. They worried about how they might "fit" in the new setting, but they would voice their concerns by raising questions as to whether they would be able to "fit" in the new chairs. So we distributed a map that showed where you could do errands, where you could get lunch, and people calmed down.

Talk Openly About Differences of Race, Gender, Class, and Age. Our work was complicated. No one person could work completely independently of others. It required both delegation and trust, actions difficult enough to begin with and often even more difficult across boundaries of difference--across boundaries in our case of race, gender, class, and age. Again, the executive staff worked these issues among ourselves first, both because they were there to be worked and as a message to the organization that these issues could be discussed. We talked about:

- What it was like to work for a woman executive;
- What it meant for an African American executive staff member to let down another African American on the executive staff;
- How women compete; and
- What it felt like to deal with issues of race in an organization whose clients were minority and in a city whose mayor was Caucasian and where racial tensions were rising.

None of this was easy. It took a long time working together to get to the point where we could talk these issues through. But the gains were definitely worth the struggle.

Time Your Stay to the Size of the Task. We took on a large task and thus needed to stay a long time. The core of the DJJ executive staff under my tenure remained intact for the seven years I was commissioner. The average tenure of less than two years for top-level agency staff may be as large an impediment to wholesale change as any other put forward by government-doubters. But this is one we can change.
Conclusion

These retrospective reflections on the process of creating a climate for innovation are offered to extend both some hope and some guidance. And, as is often the case, both hope and guidance come in the form of a story.19

Hope is needed by those charged with the seemingly impossible task of creating public agencies better able to serve citizens. Those entrusted with this task need new stories, stories that tell of real people who did not have a completely drawn map in front of them or years of success in similar efforts behind them. They need stories about people who somehow understood the importance of staying the course and were able to withstand the demands of the career fast track that beckoned. They need stories about people who can acknowledge all that went wrong while pointing out some of what worked.

Hope is also needed for others, whether citizen or academic, concerned about increasing the odds that government can work. People need stories of success to inspire them, to keep them going, and to motivate them to find ways to support those trying to change government.

Whatever guidance can be found here is offered primarily to those engaged in the work of changing government. It is my hope that our story will offer some guidance to help others invent their own stories of success.

Endnotes


4. Ibid.


12. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Justice Program, led by Ken Schoen, was funding the search firm to help expand the pool of talented correction commissioners available for appointment by newly elected governors. The foundation was persuaded that this search, while not at the same level, was important and agreed to extend the services of the search firm and the organizational development consultant working in tandem with the search firm.


