

Städte erfolgreich lenken **Governing cities successfully**

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Overview – Main Points

A. Reflections on historic practices

- Ideologies tend to be influenced by events
- Type of governance depends on type of work
- Specific examples: The Greeks, The Romans, Byzantium, The Police as watchers of morals

B. Some current tensions in public governance

- An elaboration: Risk as danger or opportunity

C. Prognosis for a future

- Applying lessons from genetics to governance

A. Reflections on historic practices

Ideology of Xerxes, King of Persia, 2½ thousand years ago

Speaking to his governors after his coronation:

“When I became the King of Persia, I began to wonder how I might increase the empire ...

“I intend to bridge the Hellespont and march an army through Europe ... Making all lands a single land.”

Persia was already a superpower

- It ruled all of Egypt and most of Asia, from the Mediterranean to India and Afghanistan
- Xerxes reasoned that Europe consisted of primitive Barbarians, and that only the Greeks stood in his way, and they were few
- He mobilized a 4-million man army and set out to make Europe part of Persia

How successful was the Ideology

- It took only a few battles to destroy it
- Mainly the land battle at Marathon, and the sea battle at Salamis
- Persia never again tried to expand westward
- A lesson is that even today, a party may get elected on a certain ideology, but may be unable to implement it due to events

The type of governance depends on the type of work

- Operating a nuclear power plant needs rigorous command, control and compliance
- A research function thrives on a culture of creativity and innovation
- A Tourist Office needs communications abilities and collegiality
- Cities operate many different tasks, hence they need a mix of governance approaches

Examples of governance approaches

- Focus on
 - Regulation-making
 - Consensus-seeking
 - Service orientation
 - Financial integrity
 - *Laissez-faire*, or barely visible governance
 - Development for the future
- All these and many more may occur in cities, hence cities need a mix of approaches

The Greeks (1)

- Two prominent Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, developed profoundly different approaches to good governance
- Plato advocated that we find people with very high competence, commitment and dedication to societal challenges and tasks
- Then appoint them to the senior positions and let them govern as best they could

The Greeks (2)

- Aristotle, the most famous student of Plato, disagreed strongly. He argued that such appointments based on good will and personal discretion would lead to corruption, dishonesty and fraud.
- Aristotle therefore wanted an independent body of law which would govern even the most senior executives and governors and ensure neutrality and honesty.

The Romans (1)

- Plato and Aristotle were theorists and wrote during the 4th century BC. We move forward to the 1st century BC and meet Cicero, a practicing statesman. He writes his book *On Duties* at the end of a life overflowing with experience on governing and governance.
- He concludes that the key to successful civilization is people's ability to work together productively under gifted leaders.

The Romans (2)

But gifted leaders also have weaknesses, and the most destructive of those is the use of fear to manipulate and dominate others, according to Cicero.

“Those who in a free state deliberately put themselves in a position to be feared are the maddest of the mad” is Cicero’s strongest statement on the subject. Leaders, he says, ought to protect rather than dominate the org.

Byzantium (1)

- The City of Constantinople was a centre of governance for over 1,000 years since its founding in 330 AD. It developed features still seen today, for example Classification Creep.
- Byzantium was rich, and the Emperor had become generous with bestowing new titles.
- In a stable bureaucracy, there is limited room for creating new positions, but people can be rewarded through promotion to higher levels.

Byzantium (2)

- 300 years after founding of the capital city, the three highest ranks of Byzantine officials were
 - Illustres
 - Spectabiles
 - Clarissimi
- With demands for greater glory, the Emperor made promotions from one level to the next higher one, but the highest level became annoyed because of overpopulation.

Byzantium (3)

- But a suitable solution was found
- The emperor created a new senior level above the old ones, called the **The Glorioso**
- The old, established Illustres were moved up, becoming Glorioso, and everyone was happy again, at least for a while
- It shows that classification creep has gone on for many centuries and will not likely stop

The police as watchers of morals (1)

- During the century of the Protestant Reformation the Landgrave of the German Land of Hessen decided to use the police to improve the morality of the population.
- In 1526 police were charged to intervene in cases of drinking during the time of church services, and in cases of cursing, swearing, gambling or gossiping.

The police and morality (2)

- And police officers who tolerated such behaviour were threatened with fines
- But the police ignored the rules and the threats
- In response, the Landgrave established “Fiscals” who had to monitor the police and were promised $\frac{1}{4}$ of the fines the police should have collected
- But neither police nor fiscals enforced the law

The police and morality (3)

- Things were as bad as ever. There was still drunkenness, fornication, carousing, and it was easy to get a divorce.
- The Landgrave became desperate and again tightened the law, but still had no success. And by 1540 even he gave up.
- The effort to improve attitudes by force had been a failure, showing the limitations of governance.

B. Some current tensions in public governance

Tensions persist in public management and governance

- Why do serious weaknesses persist in public management and governance?
- One answer is that many tensions remain
- They arise out of the roles that politics, public servants and the public play as part of governance culture
- Some tensions are illustrated here

Example of a tension (1)

- Public managers are expected to achieve important results and outcomes
- At the same time, public managers are measured on complying with detailed prescribed rules and “Due Process”
- This tension creates contradictions in managers’ minds and behaviour

Example of a tension (2)

- The public service must serve all citizens; it must satisfy 100% of the “market”
- Private enterprises can be successful when they serve a small niche of the market
- The public service is urged to be as efficient as the private sector, and is criticized if it is less efficient: a serious tension

Example of a tension (3)

- Public managers recognize that in a turbulent environment, innovation and risk taking are often important and necessary
- When managers do take risks and this results in errors, there is severe criticism because public money is wasted
- Detailed accountability rules can constrain public services from becoming more creative, innovative and effective

Risk – danger or opportunity?

Illustration from a cold country (1)

- Canada has not won a world championship in women's figure skating for 38 years Why?
- Becoming a champion takes many years, and thousands of little girls work hard at it, training and competing in local tournaments
- But judges are severe and penalize any errors
- This causes the girls to “play safe”, be cautious

Risk illustration (2)

- Hence, they don't try difficult jumps, since they might fail and be penalized by judges
- To become champion, they must do five to seven Triple Axels, but they don't even try
- The result: no more champions for Canada
- Penalties for training errors are too severe
- A lesson: Discouraging risk-taking tends to discourage progress and innovation

The tensions become dilemmas

- The tensions can also be seen as dilemmas or competing values that resist resolution
- Public managers have to cope with them as part of their working life
- Doing this well is an essential competence of management in public institutions
- UNLESS you can “beat the system”

Beating the system – an example

- 1990s: Govt. of Canada needed to save money, restricted the number of foreign trips
- Two conferences in Stockholm and London two weeks apart. Normally two trips.
- Managers are smart and find ways to cope
- They combined the two trips into one trip by “staying over” in Paris for a week
- Approved, because THE RULE was obeyed

C. Prognosis for a future:
Applying possible lessons from
genetics to the challenge of
governing cities

How can we create a better future?

- For thousands of years, we experimented with varying approaches of steering and governing organizations, yet we are still not perfect.
- The only approach that has lasted longer is life itself. It's also imperfect, but it has more experience.
- Biologists tell us that there is practically nothing that hasn't been tried in evolution to help organisms compete and survive.

Could we learn from evolution and genetics for governance?

- For about 20 years of my career I worked for the Auditor General of Canada, testing whether Depts. created value for money.
- I observed that many organizations behaved like organisms. They rejected outside ideas just as bodies reject transplanted organs.
- Did orgs. have an immune system, a DNA?

DNA, Genetics, Epigenetics

- From Genetics we know that genes make us unique, different from all others, and that genes do not change except through mutation
- Meaning that if organizations do have a DNA, they may be largely unchangeable
- Then Epigenetics came along, a new science
- Epigenes also cannot change genes, but they can switch genes ON or OFF. Also, epigenes react to stress, diet and our environment.

We are Genotypes and Phenotypes

- Our individual genetic structure tells us what **genotype** we are – a permanent feature that can be used for identification (DNA evidence)
- Our **phenotype** is our genotype modified by the associated epigenes, one epigene per gene
- Up to one quarter of our genes may at any time be switched OFF. All genes are still there, but some have been silenced by the epigenes.

Orgs. structured like organisms?

1. A basic genetic infrastructure (DNA)
2. Occasional emergence over generations of new ideas or pilot projects (mutations), many of which are deleterious / do not survive
3. A co-evolutionary mechanism by which epigenes sense tensions and stresses and turn genes ON or OFF accordingly
4. A resulting genetic constellation of active genes for optimal fit with current environment

An analogy to an electronic message board (pixels)

- Thousands of tiny light bulbs (pixels) form a board that can display different messages by activating certain bulbs and silencing others:
 - Missing child
 - Heavy storm approaching
 - Vienna best city to live in
- The difference: a message board needs an operator. Epigenes are self-organizing.

A note of caution

- I have talked with scientists about all this.
- Geneticists are either non-committal or sceptical because they see Epigenetics as being too new to make definite statements (only 20 yrs. old).
- Organizational researchers are interested. They are not sure about Epigenetics, but as a metaphor for orgs. they view it very positively.
- Hard line people dismiss the concept because it's not numeric, hence cannot be measured.

Unanswered questions

1. What kind of diagnosis would we need to determine the genotype vs. the phenotype of a specific organization? The process would need to replicate the medical approach, i.e. do a focused diagnosis before prescribing a cure.
2. How would we go about setting organization's "genes" ON or OFF in order to create a phenotype that is optimal for an organization's performance in its specific environment?

Concluding suggestion (1)

- For good governance of cities and other organizations in turbulent times, consider teams that are carefully selected for a specific project, rather than permanent teams that are used “for everything”.
- The film industry does this well. Their rule of thumb is that 90% of problems during a production is due to assigning wrong people

Concluding suggestion (2)

- Consider the part of my remarks about organizational DNA and organizational Epigenes mainly a metaphor, a stimulus for exploration.
- More work needs to be done to make this a reliable governance and management tool.



Thank You!

Further information

The points in this presentation are taken largely from my contribution “Rückblick und Ausblick: Staaten erfolgreich lenken”. It appeared in the recent book *Gut Regieren: Konzepte – Realisierungen - Perspektiven*, **in deutscher Sprache.**