BRIDGING THE GAP

A CASE FOR NATIONALISM
IN DEFENCE OF THE PEOPLE FROM SOMEWHERE
THE BLINDNESS OF THE ELITES

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A cross the world a political revolt is unfolding, fuelled by growing gaps between the general population and the ruling elite. Politically, many people no longer feel that mainstream political parties and candidates represent them. Economically, the gap between the 1 per cent and the rest is accelerating and in many countries jobs are becoming more precarious and less likely to lead to a rising standard of living. Socially, across most of the world the opportunity for better education, health, housing, and other services is becoming more distant, and societies are becoming more fragmented and fearful.

The result is a growing discontent not just with established politicians, but with longstanding institutions of government. New political movements — labelled by some as populist or nationalist — are proposing variously: to shorten the rule of law, encouraging vigilantism and mocking the judiciary; to deprive minorities of protection from crude majoritarianism; to curtail the freedom of the press and opposition political movements; and to ride roughshod over established institutions of government in the name of more direct rule.

The task of our Challenges of Government Conference 2017 was to probe and debate how to bridge the gaps on which the revolt against the status quo hinges. Drawing together activists as well as leaders from governments, firms and non-governmental organisations, thinkers from different parts of the world, we sought to probe how each of the gaps — political, economic, and social — could be bridged. The answers point to some interesting ways forward, including the need for a new narrative to underpin government, and new institutions to give that life. This has several components:

Nationalism is a rising part of the problem, but it is very likely also a part of the solution. In this volume, Blavatnik School philosopher and former Royal Marine Tom Simpson highlights the problem. Many English people voted for Brexit in order to “take back control”, a cry against a sense of dispossession. Simpson asks by what right do you take away a nation’s sense of identity, and why are the English not permitted their own cultural identity when everyone else is allowed theirs? Exposed is the need to rethink and recraft the narrative of democracy.

Inclusion nationalism may well offer a vital bridge. In these pages, Blavatnik School political scientist Maya Tudor makes this case, perhaps influenced by her own Indian and German heritage. She warns against nationalism which uses fixed features of identity — race, class, religion, or ethnicity. In difficult times, these become lightning rods for a tyranny by the majority. Outside India, born as an independent nation and homeland for all those opposed to colonial rule — an inclusive nationalism which served it well for decades — and its neighbour Pakistan, born as a nation for Muslims.

Nationalism evokes human emotions and attachments, and we need to recognize these more fully. Yuli Tamir, a scholar of liberal nationalism before her career in politics in Israel, reflects on the “liberal blindness” which has led politics astray. Liberal democracy has become an and vision driven by nationality. Stripped out (or pushed into the personal sphere) have been the values and joys of human connectedness, love, and the costs of loneliness. Needed are associations and institutions which ensure that people do not feel alone and which harness their emotions.

On the practical side, American sociologist Arlie Hochschild has much to say. In her interview with MPP student Elly Brown, she shares lessons from her time with Trump supporters in Louisiana. In her words, those are people who feel they have been waiting in a queue for the American dream, and now others are jumping that queue. To use the title of her book, these are people who are beginning to feel like “strangers in their own land”. Hochschild calls for empathy and for individual and collective actions which bridge the divides in our societies, including conversations which bring right and left together on issues of concern to both, perhaps criminal justice, or pollution.

The core institutions of representative government also need attention. In his interview with MPP student Sri Gourisankar, former Senator Russell Feingold reminds us that in America the right to vote is being eroded by not allowing felons who have served their time to vote, by limiting early voting, by requiring voter ID cards, by intimidating people not to vote, and through gerrymandering. Equally delegitimising of government, he argues, is the “Electoral College” system in the USA. He describes its origins as a racist institution, rigged for the slave states, and fundamentally anti-populist. It has to go, he says, if we are to build a new politics in which populism means winning the right to serve people.

The economic drivers of the new discontent also deserve a keen eye. In his role as Secretary of Planning, Budget and Management for Brasilia, he city has 4.2 million people in the metropolitan area, and the worst inequality in Brazil. In his contribution to this volume he outlines the foundations on which progress has been built. These include: the participation of citizens in forums to debate priorities; a database on which problems and solutions could tracked; and a clear implementation plan. The three big goals of the new government (reducing inequality, making Brasilia a model of sustainable development, and regaining trust in the State) were each translated into measurable goals with a dedicated team monitoring and reporting on progress. Technology has clearly facilitated government efforts to “bridge the gap” in some parts of the world. Vital to understand is how and where to combine the new technologies with the more familiar kinds of implementation and engagement. Outside of government, as Gourisankar Viswanathan details, technology can enable large-scale citizen participation, as is happening across cities in India. That said, as both he and other participants in the Challenges of Government highlighted, neighbourhood-level community organising is a vital ingredient to make this impactful.

Bridging the gaps which have emerged in political systems, economies, and societies around the world will require creativity and innovation on traditions which help people to feel rooted and valued. At the Blavatnik School of Government we will continue working on this, and we hope that you will as well, and that in the meantime you will enjoy this reading.
Across the globe, we are witnessing a rising tide of nationalism that marginalises minorities. From Xi to Modi to Trump, the world’s most populous countries have embraced leaders that purport to represent the interests of their ethnic or religious majorities first and foremost. Observers rightly worry that this rising fervour of nationalism has the potential to undermine checks on executive power and minority rights, both essential features of a healthy democracy.

A healthy scepticism of such ‘majoritarian’ nationalism may be warranted, but this should not lead us to reject all forms of nationalism as undesirable. In Europe particularly, mistrust of nationalism runs deep, tainted by its association with two bloody world wars. Historically, nationalism has been used to motivate withdrawal from international cooperation, aggression, war and genocide. But so too has it underpinned vibrant movements for colonial independence, the construction of generous welfare states that provide for their citizens and a feeling of solidarity that is crucial to individual identity in the modern world. As countries and regions diversify, the sense of community that nationalism can foster may be more important than ever. It is for this reason that we should seek to emphasise and celebrate inclusive forms of nationalism.

A brief detour into definitions of nationalism is in order: all nations are ‘imagined communities’. Imagined because even among the world’s smallest nations, nationals will never meet all their co-nationals face to face. Though most nations have some objective markers such as a common language or clear geographic border, many nations miss one or some of these attributes. At its founding, the United States could be argued to have had none. Yet nations are still communities because they engender common feelings of identity. Irrespective of whether a national identity is ultimately fictive in origin, nationalism is a political force that has proven powerful enough to cohere millions of individuals together and generate bonds of obligation such as paying taxes or giving national service. It is because nationalism is both powerful and deployable towards good or ill that we ought to make clearer distinctions between its beneficial and baleful forms.

Some would argue that inclusive nationalism is an oxymoron because all nations are exclusive projects with respect to who they are not. The Scots and Welsh define themselves partly by the fact
that they are not English; the Canadians define themselves partly by the fact that they are not Americans, Pakistanis partly by the fact that they are not Indians and so forth. This is widely accepted as legitimate. Moreover, there is good evidence that communities with strong bonds of solidarity are better able to provide public goods to their members in the form of education and health.

But nations can also be hierarchical with respect to their own citizens. Such citizenship hierarchies are established when ascriptive or fixed features of identity are adopted as a defining feature of the nation. Once relatively fixed features of identity – typically race, ethnicity or religion (which is not mutable in most of the developing world) – are adopted as central to the definition of the nation, citizens without those fixed features are by definition relegated to second-class citizenship. In both 19th century Germany and 20th century Malaysia, for example, a combination of religion and ethnicity was central to defining the nation. Consequently, in both of these nations in times of profound economic or political crisis, citizens without those ethnic features were more readily denied political rights than in Pakistan, especially on a population-proportionate basis.

India’s relative success in stemming communal violence is partially due to the inclusive national identity constructed at its founding, one that has denied powerful narrative resources to current attempts to re-interpret the Indian nation as a Hindu one. Pakistan’s embrace of religion as the core of the nation’s definition has by contrast encouraged a legal and widely accepted normative basis for discrimination against religious minorities and increasingly, intra-religious minorities such as Shias. If the contrast between India and Pakistan highlights the importance of celebrating inclusive nationalism, it also underscores how national identities are continually open to renegotiation.

Moments of crisis – wars, economic crashes or profound national struggles – are especially critical moments, for they offer new opportunities for national definitions to emerge and during the Enlightenment, liberal theory placed at its core the concept of rational, autonomous, self-interested individuals whose moral development reaches its peak when they act according to the moral law. In line with Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative, liberals identified morality with universal laws, estranged from personal attachments and emotional feelings. Love, connectedness, community affiliations and more particularly ethnic and national ties were therefore viewed as human fallibilities to be overcome. The personal and moral effects of being socially and emotionally engaged were dismissed, countered by moral universalism which fostered a belief in the brotherhood of man (and women too). Consequently, liberalism found itself offering a far too sterile and demanding moral axiom, to echo Freud’s words, it was expecting individuals “to live beyond their psychological means.”

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING INCLUSIVE NATIONALISM.

A nationalism established upon a hierarchical foundation will provide resources to ever-present political entrepreneurs seeking to arrogate the rights of second-class citizens to bolster the interests of the majorities, however defined. Indeed, both John Stuart Mill and Alexander Hamilton argued that this tyranny of the majority was a major threat to liberty under democratic forms of government.

For an illustration of how new states with different nationalisms have fared, it is worth contrasting India and Pakistan – nations founded 70 years ago and characterised by largely similar levels of economic development, social and ethnic diversity. Though three quarters of the citizens of both countries at their founding shared a single religion, Pakistan imagined itself as a homeland for Muslims while India imagined itself as a homeland for all those who opposed colonial rule and who committed to certain ideals of economic self-sufficiency and socialist-inspired development.

Today, 70 years after their twin-like founding, both the incidence and intensity of communal violence in India is significantly lower than in Pakistan, especially on a population-proportionate basis.

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THE BLINDNESS OF THE ELITES

YULI TAMIR

The contrast between India and Pakistan highlights the importance of celebrating inclusive nationalism.
To begin with they have to acknowledge that liberal ideals are grounded in a chain of theoretical blind spots which have something in common: they aspire to create a well-rounded, plural moral outlook that allows for a clear ranking of moral obligations and personal choices. The first of these blind spots has already been mentioned: liberalism assumed that affiliation with others is secondary to rational deliberations and personal autonomy, and inferred that individuals should subordinate feelings of attachment and solidarity to rational, universal moral principles.

The second, closely related to the first one, is grounded in a misunderstanding of the nature and importance of mediating affiliations. For example, the liberal emphasis on individualism alongside its traditional antipathy to the notion of class led liberals to focus on poverty and social gaps rather than on social identity.

What may seem as a mere semantic difference has significant consequences: class, unlike poverty, is a collective notion. It is much more than a socio-economic description; it is a way of thinking about society. Exchanging the energising and motivating “class talk” with the demoralising analysis of poverty allowed liberals to promote welfare rather than social change.

The individualisation of poverty meant that members of the working class were left to fend for themselves. In many ways, the social alienation and ensuing injured pride were harder to cope with than the loss of income and the disappearance of worthwhile jobs. It was this sense of social loneliness and the lack of cross-class solidarity that allowed for the emergence of unusual candidates such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, both willing to challenge the ruling social norms and place the socially displaced at the centre of their campaign. While Sanders invoked class issues, Trump played the national card, and both perched the thin crust covering the liberal hypocrisy around globalism, an ideology justified by universal values that benefited a few at the expense of many.

Frustration released the repressed nationalist voice: people started drawing a thicker line between “us” and “them”; our jobs, our future, our power, our hegemony. The close affinity between economic crisis and the emergence of nationalism has a long history, yet it has been described as an expression of the moral feebleness, fearfulness, and irrationality of the masses.

I would like to dispute this distinction, suggesting that for many the national choice is a rational choice; or, to put it differently, nationalism is the rational choice of the masses just as much as it is of the elites.

The gap between the different choices has been widened by processes of globalisation that deepen the rift between the elites and the masses. Despite Marx’s best hopes the workers of the world have no power or will to unite; their plight forces them to constantly compete with each other. The workers want governments to put their interests first – not because they are supremacists or chauvinists, but because they have rightly noticed that the social contract has been broken and they are left unprotected. Their nationalism is more economic than cultural or racial and more rational than emotional. Ironically, it is the elites of the world who have united. They have deserted their homelands, rejecting their social and economic obligations: they send their children to international schools and desert their homelands, rejecting their social and economic obligations.

The demand to prioritise one’s nation, if accepted, could be the beginning of a productive alliance fostering a more just and inclusive distribution of social and political power. It should recover the cross-class coalition characteristic of the nation-state and promise citizens they will not be left alone. It should recover the cross-class coalition characteristic of the nation-state and promise citizens they will not be left alone.
A political fault line deepens across the United States, many are searching for answers on how American society became deeply divided, and how it might begin to reverse the trend. Professor Arlie Hochschild, renowned sociologist at UCL, Berkeley, California, has been at the forefront of academic thought in this field. Best known for her work on emotions and the family, her 2016 book Strangers in Their Own Land chronicled the five years she spent immersed in Republican country in Louisiana, studying the role of emotions in political beliefs.

MPP student Elly Brown sat down with her to discuss her latest work, and the light it sheds on how we can better bridge the gaps opening up across our societies.

EB: The theme of the Blavatnik School’s 2017 Challenges of Government Conference was ‘bridging the gap’. What are the biggest gaps you see in American society today?

AH: There is a deep story underlying each person’s political beliefs. This isn’t unique to the right – there is a deep story for the left too. A deep story is a situation that feels true to you. It’s a little like a dream, with the language of the deep story manifesting as metaphor. In this way, it is closer to the realm of emotion than reason, and you draw facts and moral judgements from your deep story.

The deep story of the right is: You’re standing in line, as if on a pilgrimage, facing a hill on top of which is the American dream. Your feet are tired, and the line is not moving. You feel a strong sense of desire to get there; that you deserve to get there. Then suddenly, you see people cutting in front of you in line. Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees; even the brown pelican of Louisiana, with its oil-soaked wings, seemed to get there; that you deserve to get there. Then suddenly, you see people cutting in front of you in line. Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees; even the brown pelican of Louisiana, with its oil-soaked wings, seemed to get there; that you deserve to get there.

EB: At the Conference, you talked about the concept of ‘deep stories’. What do you mean by a deep story, and how does it drive the political divides we are experiencing?

AH: You speak of traditional ‘bridges’ in society that help people climb the ‘empathy wall’ towards understanding each other’s stories – groups such as labour unions, churches, sports teams, and community organisations. Given many of these groups are on the decline, do you have any ideas for how we might rebuild, or create new bridges?

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AH: It’s becoming apparent that we need new bridges, and a lot of people are out there building them. For example, there’s a website called www.bridgealliance.us, which is an umbrella group of more than eighty community organisations who, in their different ways, are all trying to bridge the gap. It’s very exciting really – it’s civil society bubbling up.

What I’d particularly love to see would be bridges being built from high schools. For example, we could create an exchange programme for high school sensors, where kids from different regions swap places for a while. I also recently participated in a project called ‘Living Room Conversations’, where left and right are brought together to see if they can find common ground. It was a powerful way of bridging the gap through storytelling. There are many more examples out there – we’re in the worst of moments, but it’s bringing out all kinds of creative ideas from people of goodwill, of whom there are many.

My method was simple. I listened first – a great deal, to a lot of people over a long period of time. I then put what I was hearing into a story, and played it back to those I had spoken with. One said, “you read my mind”; another said, “I live your analogy”.

EB: Your journey was a very immersive, personal one. What would it take to scale this understanding and bridging of the divide?

AH: The whole premise of my work is that we’re never going to get to the bottom of this divide in politics if we aren’t teaching people how to imagine themselves in different stories.

It’s not just a gap in beliefs, but a gap in the capacity to hear someone’s story, and identify with the person in that story. Even when we hear stories, we often guard against identification. We guard our deep stories, and come to deflect certain kinds of knowledge that don’t fit with them. The deep story has fur and bristles – it protects itself when threatened by conflicting information. Knowledge itself is neutral, but our relationship to it is anything but.

What I found in Louisiana is that people might know something, but they would hold that knowledge at a distance. They knew all the issues facing Louisiana. They’re not ignorant, they are very smart. But they would hold that knowledge at a distance. They knew all the issues facing Louisiana. They’re not ignorant, they are very smart. But they would hold that knowledge at a distance.

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IN DEFENCE OF THE PEOPLE FROM SOMEWHERE
TOM SIMPSON

I was recently part of a colloquium on immigration to the UK. I got rather overexcited by the programme: I was to share the panel with, among others, a Professor of English Identity and Politics. Who knew? The idea that English identity could be worth taking seriously runs counter to the unstated assumption that it’s somehow a bit cross or perhaps a bit racist to take pride in one’s being English. That’s the sort of thing that happens on the football terraces, along with barely chants and unholy amounts of Fosters lager. It’s not quite what academics go in for.

John Denham – the Professor in question – did take English identity very seriously indeed. But I was wrong, of course, to think that this meant he might see some value in being English. As his reason for taking the post, he cited some polling evidence from the UK’s recent EU Referendum. This showed that those who identified as ‘English more than British’ or ‘British not English’ were twice as likely to vote Leave as Remain. And those who identified as ‘British more than English’ or ‘British only’ were twice as likely to vote Remain.

Viewing oneself as English was, for Denham, a proxy indicator of regressive attitudes. He had left Parliament, including service as the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, in order to pursue a reconstructive project. How can ‘Englishness’ be recalibrated, so that ‘being English’ is an available identity, rather than an exclusive one? Plainly enough, these questions are not unique to England.

Somewhere folk are geographically mobile; feel at home where they find themselves; embrace openness and diversity; and tend to be socially liberal. Somewhere folk value their rootedness, so tend to live close to where they grew up, embrace order and are at home in homogeneous societies; and tend to be socially conservative. Above all, Anywhere attitudes are found dominantly among the tertiary educated; and Somewhere attitudes dominate among those who are not. There is evidence to suggest that the within-culture differences along this spectrum are more significant than the between-culture differences. The ‘Anywhere’ from Istanbul has more in common with the professional IT worker in Delhi than with the peasant farmer in Anatolia. And that peasant farmer in Anatolia may well have more in common with the steel worker in Sheffield, in terms of social attitudes.

Part of the significance of the analysis is that it spends Bill Clinton’s slogan: the clue to understanding current ruptures is that it is not about the economy, stupid. It’s about meaning, not money.

So part of the ‘elite-people’ divide is an attitudinal one. As the task is to bridge the gap, I wish to draw three outline lessons on how to do this, for people like us: tertiary-educated folk, in positions of power and influence now or in the future, likely to have cosmopolitan prospects and cosmopolitan tastes.

Legitimacy. All the indications were, during our panel, that John Denham is a man of integrity, intelligence, sympathy, and committed to public service. But his project left me with a sour taste. By what right do you seek to take away a nation’s sense of itself, to mould it in an image you prefer? What makes it that the English are not permitted a sense of cultural identity, but everyone else is? By what right do you impose your cosmopolitan preferences on a people who value who they are and where they come from? By what right do you try to make incomers ‘feel at home’, by taking away the sense of home of those already here? On Goodhart’s analysis, Somewheres outnumber Anywheres by about two to one; they are 50 per cent of the population to Anywheres’ 20–25 per cent, with a remaining group of ‘in-betweeners’.

A useful intellectual habit for us would be to ask: when I espouse policy positions which have the nice result that they fit my cosmopolitan preferences, are my arguments mere rationalisations for a result that I find congenial? For those who do not share my preferences, are the arguments persuasive? Is what I view as a matter of justice merely the imposition of my preferences on those who do not share them?

Representation. The Brexit vote revealed the astonishing level of under-representation of ‘Somewhere’ preferences among those in the UK’s structures of governance. I predict that the same is probably what is happening now, and the process of radicalisation is symbiotic. But the wider disconnect between the curated public conversation and the population’s actual sentiments, the greater the opportunity for radicals and charlatans to fill the void. Democracy is designed to allow the people to hold elites to account. But it is not guaranteed that what form that will take.

R. R. Reno recounts hearing a young woman from France tell of how her Muslim neighbours annually return to Tunisia or Algeria to visit family. The trips are cherished opportunities to go “home”. Her voice breaking with emotion, she asked, “If I lose France, where can I go?” Reno observes, correctly: There is no more explosive political polarisation.

To conclude, what are the consequences of a failure to bridge this divide? It is possible that cosmopolitan powerbrokers double-down on their prejudices, and enact policies that are discordant with the majority’s hopes, further angling them as they do. This is probably what is happening now, and the process of radicalisation is symbiotic. But the wider disconnect between the curated public conversation and the population’s actual sentiments, the greater the opportunity for radicals and charlatans to fill the void. Democracy is designed to allow the people to hold elites to account. But it is not guaranteed that what form that will take.

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A new contract between capital and society


THE 2017 EDELMAN SURVEY REPORTS THAT ABOUT 60 PER CENT OF BRITONS AND AMERICANS BELIEVE “THE SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING”. THE GENERAL POPULATION’S TRUST IN FOUR KEY INSTITUTIONS — BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, NGOs, AND MEDIA — HAS DECLINED BROADLY, A PHENOMENON NOT REPORTED SINCE EDELMAN BEGAN TRACKING TRUST AMONG THIS SEGMENT IN 2012.

WHAT WENT WRONG? WHY HAS THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN SO MANY WESTERN SOCIETIES LOST TRUST IN DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM?

PRIMARY, I BELIEVE BECAUSE OF STRUCTURAL MISMAGEMENT BY ELITES IN OUR SOCIETIES — A MISMANAGEMENT BORN OF THREE FACTORS: A SIMPLISTIC IDEOLOGY, GREED, AND A LACK OF LEADERSHIP. LET ME TAKE THESE IN TURN.
“NOW IS THE MOMENT TO HOLD ELITES TO ACCOUNT FOR UNRESTRAINED GREED.”

WANTED: A NEW THEORY OF PUBLIC VALUE

Gerald Z Lan

Britain grappled in the 1990s with the implications of free trade with poorer countries and a laxer immigration policy, particularly on low-skilled immigrants, many businesses welcomed the cheap labour, failing to consider what this meant for their current employees or even their customer base.

Perhaps nowhere is this phenomenon of greed embracing ideology more prevalent than in the shaping of corporate tax policy. In the US, corporate tax law is now a cesspool of opportunism – with exception after Byzantine exception crafted to lower corporate obligations to the state. In lobbying for this perversion, corporations have often euphemised their tax evasion as being “tax efficient” – wittily co-opting the notion of “economic efficiency” as an excuse for their avarice.

The final ingredient in explaining capitalism’s loss of goodwill is a lack of leadership – for not all business leaders have fallen victim to a simplistic ideology or embraced unfettered greed. Indeed, many such leaders have long recognised the nuance that capitalism is fragile: that “free and fair markets” are not inherently natural to man, but rather a social construct, useful in many settings, where they must be actively preserved through good laws.

But many of these leaders plead an inability to act in the broader public interest, arguing that doing so would put them at a competitive disadvantage versus their more profit-minded peers.

The need for bold leadership

If the data on the declining trust in capitalism is accurate, the stakes are high. Inequality in the Western world is rising, and belief that the political system is unfair is likely delegitimising liberal democracy itself. Now, more than at any time in recent history, is the moment to correct the narrative on capitalism, to hold elites to account for unrestrained greed, and to call for bold leadership from those most capable of delivering it.

History has not been kind to generations who have previously ignored this moment.

The work starts here – in schools of leadership like Oxford’s Blavatnik School, in how we seed a habit of empathy, in how we cultivate critical analytical thinking, in how we empower moral duties, in how we inspire courageous action.

Karthik Ramana is Professor of Business & Public Policy and Director of the MPP at the Blavatnik School of Government.

1. Reform theories were wrong and reform efforts failed to be on the right track

The reform rhetoric of recent decades glorified privatisation almost to the point that it seemed like its advocates wanted government disbanded. Ronald Reagan once forcefully claimed that his measures were not intended to change the government, but to do away with it. There is of course nothing wrong with emphasising individual rights and private efforts. However, downplaying the forces that coordinate those private efforts, and inflating the importance of self-interest way beyond that of the public interest, tipped the balance of society. It accelerated the growth of the gap between social classes, legitimised extreme self-serving behaviour, and demoralised those engaged in civil service. Ideally, the Reagan-Thatcher privatisation and decentralisation reforms should have helped alleviate bureaucratic red tape, correct
Barry Bozeman, an American professor, wrote a book called All Organizations Are Public. His argument is that this is true, only to differing degrees. All organisations are subject to public scrutiny, are not supposed to harm society, are regulated by public policy, and are obliged to pay taxes. In this sense, in today’s entangled world, the behaviour of organisations is bound to have impact on the public’s life. The Lehman Brothers’ bankruptcy made a few people rich but destroyed the lives of many, and left behind a huge problem for the government to handle. Bozeman argues that we should not wait until the market fails, and instead proposes a theory of Public Value Failure, which allows governments to intervene at an earlier stage.

In our new century, we surely realise that harmonious coexistence, global warming, a shared global economy, and sustainable development are emerging as the most powerful drivers. The key emphasis of public service is no longer economic development and technological innovation, which are now automatically built into our processes; the average per capita GDP is $17,000 U.S. dollars and technological breakthroughs occur on a daily basis. But the world is still riddled with poverty and homelessness. As time goes by and economic structures stabilise, our world and our governments face fresh challenges and priorities. Bridging the gap seems to be a critical concern of our time, and our world and our governments face fresh challenges and priorities.

3. Reasserting public values, infrastructure building, public service delivery, and justice in distribution are the key to governmental success

The evidence of recent decades shows us that privatisation and decentralisation are not enough. A shared belief in the promotion of public interest is the key to social success. In order that our civil society has a chance of reclaiming the power to shape what is fair, we need leadership and robust government that asserts public values, builds infrastructure, delivers public services, and ensures justice in the redistribution of social wealth. Only when all individuals live with freedom and dignity, can the gaps that split our society be filled and our world become a more harmonious global village for mankind.

Dr Gerald Z Lan is Professor, School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University

Russ Feingold is on a mission to renovate and protect democracy in the United States. A former three-term United States Senator representing Wisconsin, Feingold has been writing and speaking about how to restore public trust in institutions.

RF: It’s sometimes hard to make sense of the variety of anti-establishment and populist narratives across the globe. Which aspects do you think unite them, and what do you think a different about the situation in the United States?

SG: Well, if you’re from the type of political background I’m from, you don’t begin with the premise that populism is a dirty word. I come from a state with a very positive association with the great Progressive movement, which was a populist movement of that era. I can understand, given the role that populism has played in other countries, that it can be the basis of fear. But populism reflects the will of the people, when people feel that their government has cut them out. This isn’t about stamping out populism, but instead about addressing legitimate grievances that the populist movements have, and disregarding those grievances or approaches that are illegitimate, if they relate to race, outrageous anti-immigrant sentiment, and religious discrimination.


SG: You served Wisconsin in the Senate for 18 years, but were defeated in 2004, 2008, and 2012. That makes the state’s sharp turn to the right in the 2010 and 2016 elections puzzling.

RF: In 2010, the entire economy was in a terrible pit and we had a Democratic president, a Democratic United States Senator, a Democratic governor in Wisconsin, a Democratic Assembly, a Democratic State Senate in Wisconsin. [My loss then] is easier to understand than what happened in 2016, which went against all the electoral patterns in a presidential year. And I think it had to do with this disconnect that we’re talking about at the Challenges of Government conference. People associated, whether fairly or not, Hillary and Bill Clinton with the ‘establishment’. You know, I have opposed free trade agreements throughout my political career. I had a feeling that they were going to leave people displaced with very little, and that’s exactly what happened. Unfortunately, the Democratic party went along with them, and a lot of the Democratic base that had got Democrats elected in the past no longer felt that they could trust the Party to represent the values of the average worker.

SG: We now recognise that technology — automation and AI — has also contributed to a list of manufacturing job losses. What is the role of the government in helping workers respond? Is it reskilling and education? How do you rebuild confidence?

RF: Anyone who is honest about [manufacturing job losses] admits that a lot of it has to do with technology. I’ve been on many tours of the General Motors plant in Janesville, where I grew up, and the last few times it was these incredible machines doing what my
neighbours used to do! So that’s part of it. But I’m also convinced that the part we could have done better was to avoid crafting unfair trade agreements that did not provide proper retraining to people. The TAA [Trade Adjustment Assistance] programme wasn’t ever properly funded and it didn’t work properly. Maybe prices are lower in general. But it doesn’t work for the person who has lost their living and lost their sense of self-worth. That loss of status and self-esteem – as well as economic loss – has to do with this trust gap.

SG: What would you recommend policymakers work on going forward?

RF: When I started work in 1977 here is how I wrote a letter. On my desk were two phones, one for calls, the other a little green Dictaphone. I would start with the words ‘A letter please, typist’, spelling out the name and address of the lucky recipient. My stumbling words would be recorded on to some sort of re-usable disk, in a distant, open plan office. The disk would be removed from the recording machine and put on a rack, to be typed up and sent back to me in a couple of days’ time. Inevitably corrections would be needed but after a week or so it would be ready to be dispatched by second-class post.

In the 40 years since a range of technological developments have rendered most of the jobs in the process obsolete, including what was my own as the person writing the letter in the first place. And I could tell a similar story about the manufacture of the car I drove at the time (a little green MG, self-deceivingly envisaged as the first in a line of flash motors). Technology moves on relentlessly and with it the workplace is regularly transformed. With the advent of the self-driving car many worry that something new is afoot. Estimates have suggested that a seventh of all jobs in the US are at risk, and those who will lose out are already disaffected. But futurology is a risky business. In an essay published in 1931 John Maynard Keynes predicted that as a result of scientific progress and the miracle of compound interest by 2031 we would have ‘solved the economic problem’. No one would need to work more than three hours a day, which they would already be doing. But futurology is a risky business. In an essay published in 1931 John Maynard Keynes predicted that as a result of scientific progress and the miracle of compound interest by 2031 we would have ‘solved the economic problem’. No one would need to work more than three hours a day, which they would already be doing. But futurology is a risky business. In an essay published in 1931 John Maynard Keynes predicted that as a result of scientific progress and the miracle of compound interest by 2031 we would have ‘solved the economic problem’. No one would need to work more than three hours a day, which they would already be doing.
马克思，像任何人一样，是技术变革的理论家。他预测，每当工资上涨，资本家就会投资劳动节约型的机器，从而导致工人失业。减少劳动力会降低成本，但当所有资本家同时这样做时，它会导致经济需求下降并促使经济崩溃。因此，马克思认为，资本主义的自然功能是繁荣和萧条。值得注意的是，在好时候，政治家和经济学家会报告他们已经掌握了经济并最终实现了可持续增长，但在经济衰退时，他们迅速提醒我们，这个周期会来拯救我们。

马克思建议，走出周期的途径部分来自于企业家在新兴产业中为失业者提供低工资的新就业机会。但新就业者不一定是那些失去工作的人。那些年岁过大或过于固执不愿重新培训的人，或者认为新的工作机会低于他们，将会面临困难，甚至可能非常喧闹。技术变革将带来赢家和输家，我们无法准确预测。我们应该做些什么？我们可以从杰里米·边沁的书中汲取灵感，他惊恐地发现，利比亚和希腊还没有引入印刷机，仍在雇用许多抄写员。当然，边沁认为，这是必须引入的。但对于抄写员这些低薪而被压迫的人，也必须得到照顾。如果他们无法重新培训，那么他们必须以其他方式得到补偿。毕竟，如果一个变化是为公众利益而来的，那么一个基本的正义原则就是那些处于收入分配底部的人不应变得更糟，而那些已经大大致富的人不应在新财富来源中坐享其成。

Jonathan Wolff is Blavatnik Professor of Public Policy, Blavatnik School of Government.

"EVERY GENERATION SEEMS TO THINK IT IS GOING THROUGH UNPRECEDENTED TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE."

BRIDGING THE DELIVERY GAP
THE BRASILIA EXPERIENCE – GETTING POLICY RIGHT

LEANY BARREIRO LEMOS

Brasilia is the modernist archetypal city planned by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer in the late fifties. Designed to be an administrative city of around 500,000 people, its urbanistic plan was supposed to reflect an egalitarian utopia. About 60 years later, Brasilia has a population of three million people – 4.2 million if you count its metropolitan area – the highest per capita income (around USD 21,000 per year) and the worst Gini Index (measuring wealth distribution) of the country. It has the best access to infrastructure (water, electricity, sewage, internet), while the basic health programme reached only 20 per cent of the population in 2014, causing emergency rooms to be constantly overbooked. From an electorate of two million, 20 per cent never went to school or did not finish elementary level, whereas 24 per cent have college level education. Rich and poor, Brasilia needs investment in critical areas. It is a huge challenge to any government to engage and respond satisfactorily to a society with such strong social and economic cleavages. But let’s add complexity. As a well documented, social pressures on the delivery of public services are on the rise. Brazil had its own “Spring” in June 2013, when millions of citizens went to the streets signalling strong dissatisfaction with government. Also, Brazil is undergoing unprecedented political and economic crises – on the one hand, corruption scandals and presidential impeachment, on the other, facing since 2015 the worst recession in its history. The drop in revenues has represented a serious constraint on investment. It is a huge challenge to any government to engage and respond satisfactorily to a society with such strong social and economic cleavages. But let’s add complexity. As a well documented, social pressures on the delivery of public services are on the rise. Brazil had its own “Spring” in June 2013, when millions of citizens went to the streets signalling strong dissatisfaction with government. Also, Brazil is undergoing unprecedented political and economic crises – on the one hand, corruption scandals and presidential impeachment, on the other, facing since 2015 the worst recession in its history. The drop in revenues has represented a serious constraint on investment.

First step: Build the roadmap and acquire the necessary tools. In Brazil, candidates have to register plans for government before elections. A candidate, Rodrigo Rollemberg, now Governor of the Federal District, produced a strong plan to rebuild society. The 90-page proposal rested on three foundations: a) social participation – four seminars were held in different sectors of the city, during which more than 1,616 people debated and contributed; b) strong data – a database was built with microdata from different statistics agencies and specialists were interviewed; c) a method – a problem tree was used to trace clear cause/effect problems and design objectives. The result was a plan with 467 commitments divided in three axes – City, Citizen, Citizenship, comprising 14 issue areas. After Rollemberg won the election with 55 per cent of the votes cast, information gathering and social dialogue continued. During the three-month transition period, staff prepared a risk matrix, since the city’s fiscal situation was extreme and many services had stopped. When the government was inaugurated, a 120-day plan for recovery was in place, running parallel to a positive agenda. It was necessary to negotiate with strikers and contractors, accelerate procurement and reduce the impact of the various crises, as well as delivering. Having a strategy was crucial. The first secretariat meeting focused on building the strategic plan, using a Balance Score Card and the government plan legitimised by the election. In less than 60 days, the cabinet validated a strategic map, with three foundations – reducing inequality, making Brasilia a model of sustainable development and regaining trust in the State. Seventeen objectives and 252 indicators were in place. A managerial model was institutionalised, with the map, yearly Results Agreements with each secretary, and regular meetings with the Governor to assess their development and the strategy. All this information – map, agreements, indicators – is fed into a system. We also established, under the Planning, Budget and Management Secretary, a team devoted to monitoring and supporting. This also coordinates a network of 50 specialists, one in each agency or unit, responsible for monitoring its result agreement and updating the system. These 50 have been receiving constant methodology training and support. One year on, a Project Office was created in the Governor’s office to manage top priority projects. In three years, there have been 69 agreements, with a total of 1,591 deliveries, and the success rate has been above 50 per cent. Sixty-four per cent of the government plan commitments have been delivered or are on the way. We have had good results in spite of the economic crises, precisely because there was clear problem identification and a strategy that made it possible to focus on what matters most. A combination of state capacity, methodology, trained and committed human resources, technology and leadership were the foundations for achieving the goals.

Second step: Getting back to the people. The government has reassessed many of its policies. The Governor himself has a programme called “rodas de conversa”, informal town hall meetings with hundreds of people in gymnasiaums, schools and tents. In the first two years 5,700 people participated. In the Planning Secretariat, we have developed local meetings for pluri-annual planning, the “voz ativa” (active voice). Besides, every year, when drafting budget laws, we hold a public meeting and open social media channels for contributions for 30 days. With that, in two years we have reached 1,870 contributions.

There are at least two other ways to stay connected. First is the ombudsmen (“ouvóirias”). Citizens can use a call centre or the internet to register complaints and suggestions at any time. This system has just received an Innovation Award from the National School of Administration. Secondly, we are constantly conducting surveys on public services, which are used to improve delivery quality.

Getting back to the people is an important democratic exercise, but presents its challenges. On the one hand, demands sometimes lack tangibility (“better health”) or sustainability (“a hospital in my region”), when epidemiological studies would not justify it. On the other, Wancir Olsen’s collective action problem comes up frequently: organised groups have more resources and get more, whereas the non-organised, who are sometimes numerator, get less. More importantly, public goods, which are by nature non-excludable and non-rivalrous, might not be provided due to a free-rider rationale.

Third step: Delivery decisions – three types of demand–delivery policies in Brasilia. The first type is “I want it, I get it”. Citizens get the policy exactly as demanded. One example is “more childcare”. Sixteen new childcare facilities for children aged up to three are now in place, prioritising economically vulnerable families. This has allowed more than 2,000 children to enrol. Also, we are buying slots in non-profit childcare, allowing 18,000 new registrations of 4-5 year olds, which meets 100 per cent of demand. The second type is “I want it, I get differently”. Citizens ask for a policy (“more hospitals”), but it is reinterpreted (“better prevention and basic attention in health”). In this case, although there is a 220-bed children’s hospital being built, the main policy is to increase the coverage of the Family Health Strategy (multi-professional teams that visit families in the community) from 30 per cent to 55 per cent in two years. The third type is “I did not ask for it, but I get it”. This speaks directly to the non-provision of public goods dilemma. Citizens rarely ask for pure air or clean and treated water. But some actions are extremely important to avoid disaster.

There are two examples of non-demanded but delivered policies. First, the deactivation of a dump that has been in place for 60 years, causing environmental and social distress. A new landfill started operating on 17 January, 2017, designed to receive the 27 million tons of waste produced yearly in Brasilia. Second, the construction of the Congonhas water production system, which will ensure the water supply for 30 years. Though not demanded, they emerged from the data-designed plan as crucial – if these initiatives were not delivered, it would affect environmental and hydric safety in the city for decades, a tremendous hazard.

Conclusion

Reaching out is not an easy job. Who will be listening, how frequently, and to what extent? Equally difficult is to translate words into policies that fit fairness criteria, especially when operating under political, economic or technical constraints. In Brasilia’s case, it was essential that the plan was built with an understanding of society, strategy and state capacity. It was vital to prioritise demands, attending not only to the prasing ones, but also to those responsible for collective well-being. Delivering good policies during fiscal crises is achievable, but only with hard work and a strong, constant commitment to citizenship.

Leany Barreiros de Sousa Lemos is Secretary of State for Planning, Budget and Management, Brasilia.

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Bridging the delivery gap
The idea of citizenship is central to a democracy. The meaning of citizenship and what its practice would look like in an open, democratic society is still evolving. Beyond bestowing rights on citizens, what else should governments do to cultivate citizenship? Besides voting in elections and exercising their rights, what else should citizens of a democracy practise in their daily engagement with other citizens and with the state? Discovering practical answers to these questions will be key to strengthening the idea of democracy. The pathway to this discovery does not exist in any finished form, and will need to be created with deliberate and often hotly contested and messy efforts. Cities are most likely to be the places that will witness or even catalyse this discovery.

In 2007, for the first time, more people around the world lived in cities than in villages. By 2050, two thirds of the global population is expected to live in cities. Demographically, economically and environmentally, cities are beginning to rise to global significance on a historically unprecedented scale. Particularly in democracies, the challenge will be to envision cities as economically vibrant, equitable and environmentally sustainable habitats, within a governance framework that builds trust between citizens and city governments.

India’s cities and its democracy
India’s population in its cities is over 400 million, and expected to breach 800 million or 50 per cent of the total population by 2050. The country’s ability to meet the socio-economic aspirations of hundreds of millions of its citizens will depend on how well we manage our cities and their growth. As a democracy, quality of infrastructure and services alone cannot be a barometer of quality of life in our cities. Quality of citizenship is an end in itself, besides arguably being a means to better quality of infrastructure and services. We will therefore need to transform the quality of citizenship in Indian cities at a massive scale to transform quality of life, and through that the lives of hundreds of millions of our citizens.

Civic technology and citizenship
India’s cities are not per se recognised by the constitution as independent units of governance or economy. A constitutional amendment in the early 1990s only walked half the distance and has not been implemented fully by state governments. The result has been a lack of formal platforms and processes for citizen participation in cities. Technology and social media have however opened up new possibilities. Through its promise of connecting citizens to city governments on a transformative scale and in real time, technology holds out the promise of a two-way communication system, of geo-spatial civic analytics, of hyper-local civic engagement and of data-driven engagement and accountability.

Connecting citizens to governments
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Connecting citizens to governments
The Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy’s civic technology platforms www.ipaidabribe.com and www.ichangemycity.com have demonstrated that this promise is real.

Launched in 2010, ipaidabribe.com has clocked 15 million visits and was launched in 30 countries. In India, ipaidabribe.com has recorded 140,000 bribe reports across 1,071 cities. We expect ipaidabribe.com to continue to grow in size and impact. ichangemycity.com is a social change platform that seeks to demonstrate a sustainable model for hyper-local civic participation. It now has 500,000 registered users in Bengaluru city.

Deeper penetration of smart phones and falling mobile internet prices combined with the proliferation of easy-to-use mobile applications have further accentuated the power of civic technology. Public Eye, an app for citizens to report easily on traffic violations, was developed by ichangemycity in collaboration with the Bengaluru Traffic Police, a state government agency. Swachhata, an app for citizens to report garbage hotspots, was developed in collaboration with the central government.

Public Eye was launched in 2015 and has received over 90,000 traffic complaints with a 64 per cent resolution rate. Swachhata was built following a request from the Government of India, and is the official mobile application and web platform of the Swachh Bharat Mission across Indian cities. Built under Prime Minister Modi’s flagship mission, the app has witnessed over six million complaints across 1,500 cities since its launch in August 2016. Today, more than 4,000 engineers are trained to use the Swachhata app to resolve complaints in real time – 500,000 garbage dumps have been cleared across hundreds of cities in less than a year.

Both these applications have demonstrated that civic technology can enable large-scale citizen participation in India’s cities.
“CIVIC TECHNOLOGY CAN ENABLE LARGE-SCALE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN INDIA’S CITIES.”

Three ingredients for success
Civic technology will be a transformative change agent when accompanied by three ingredients: systematic civic learning, neighbourhood-level community organising, and government adoption. Civic learning is necessary to move citizens through the ladder of citizenship from passive to an interested participant. Neighbourhood-level community organising and civic technology can reinforce each other. While civic technology can enable neighbourhood-level platforms for citizen participation through customised applications, such platforms are necessary to throw the citizenship net wider and engage a larger number of citizens. Government adoption of civic technology is a game-changer, irrespective of whether the government builds its own platform or adopts independent third-party platforms. Government responsiveness is key to sustaining citizen engagement in civic technology platforms. In an increasingly urban democracy with exponential mobile and data penetration, governments are increasingly adapting technology to connect with citizens even if as a signal of political proactiveness.

The future
India’s journey of socio-economic growth will be unique and collaborative. As S. Swati Ramanathan and Remesh Ramanathan argued in their recent paper in the Journal of Democracy, India will not have the luxury of evolved state capacities to deliver on human development, but would need to home-grow innovative models of partnership and collaboration. Cities will be at the centre of such innovative models. A multi-stakeholder collaborative model of delivering socio-economic growth at the scale of India’s needs will need an ecosystem of trust. We are weaving this fabric of trust and in the process discovering citizenship in all its colourful dimensions, and deepening democracy in India’s cities, all through civic technology.

Srikanth Viswanathan is Chief Executive Officer at Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.

“CIVIC TECHNOLOGY CAN ENABLE LARGE-SCALE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN INDIA’S CITIES.”

Some defining features
There are specific defining features of civic technology that are enabling wider citizen participation in India’s cities. Independent civic technology platforms are making two-way communication possible. Government platforms in India are notorious for being black boxes, facilitating only one-way communication from citizens to government without any effective response mechanism. Web and mobile platforms have made real-time two-way communication possible. While the right-to-information legislation opened up government records to public access over a decade ago, civic technology has genuinely made real-time two-way communication possible. While the deepening of civic learning, democratised this information through wide dissemination in a ready-to-access format and channel. The deepening of civic learning, a stepping stone to citizen participation, is taking root in cities. Civic analytics are powering the leap from open data to actionable insights, where citizens are able to effectively use neighbourhood-level quality of life and budget data to engage with governments on hyper-local civic issues. Such data, when tailored into stakeholder dashboards, is empowering citizens to hold their elected councillors and municipal officials accountable between elections. Geo-locations and real-time communication of photos and videos is further redefining the accountability of civic officials. All of the above features can also be tailored differently for different stakeholders through customised mobile apps for citizens, municipal officials and elected councillors.

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The theme of the Challenges of Government Conference was ‘Bridging the Gap’. There are multiple gaps in many areas. What is the gap between the private and the public sector and how is it relevant?

AH: The first thing that I wanted to create was constructive engagement, where the public sector accepts its faults and weaknesses, and welcomes partners who would like to make it perform better. The next thing was to ensure that, at least as far as Africa is concerned, this engagement is not an emotional one. We want a reasoned dialogue based on enlightened thinking and intellectual rigour, which is why we chose partners like the Blavatnik School of Government, where we can subject ideas to research and debate, but also learn from others across the world and how they have approached these issues.

If you were to ask what are the indicators by which we would measure whether the Africa Initiative for Governance was successful, we have a few things we look at. Firstly, how many competent and highly skilled men and women can we attract to work for the government? Secondly, as a result of the number of skilled men and women going into government, how has public policy improved in terms of impact on the people? Thirdly, can we change the narrative about public policy? In Nigeria, has the narrative around the public sector changed from being seen as a disabler of progress to an enabler of progress?

AA: Certainly, I have found that the hands are not equal. The government is the one who has more power in this relationship – the constitutional power rests with the government. To have any meaningful impact, the hand of partnership offered by the private sector must be accepted by the public sector.

AH: A public official can do good and bad things – for example, prevent business from taking place by just signing a piece of paper. How do we protect the private sector from the government when the latter fails to carry out its responsibilities?

AA: That is almost impossible. This was one of the motivations that led me to found the Africa Initiative for Governance. It comes from the frustrating reality that there is no safety net. If you have poor public policy the results are disastrous.

AH: This brings me to my next question. What are the goals of the Africa Initiative for Governance and how can it have an impact for change?

AA: It is not that these values are absent in African states, it just happens that they are not very present in the lives and character of most of those in leadership positions at this point in time. Some things happened to change concepts of morality in African society. One is military rule and conflict. As we know, dictatorial systems of government can very easily abuse the position of privilege and power. So, many of those values are submerged within society and we must find a way to elevate them, re-establish and institutionalise them. This is not going to happen organically. We have to make deliberate efforts to bring them out, which is why partnerships...
between civil society, NGOs, academic institutions like the Blavatnik School and platforms like the AIG working with people in government are the key.

**AH:** Since you mentioned the Blavatnik School of Government, we as MPP students have had this year a public service week, with the theme ‘How do I serve?’. Your profile represents an entrepreneur with a commitment to public service. What is your message, how do you serve?

**AA:** All around the world, the business sector is viewed with suspicion because of its influence and lobbying. How do you as someone from that sector see an opportunity to protect the government from this approach?

**AA:** You know, the concept of impartiality really has its roots in the rule of law. The key thing for us is to ensure that the rules of the game are followed and people are held accountable to play by the rules. For the referee, which is government, we must also ensure it is held accountable in its role. When those lines are blurred, people get away with a lot of things. However, I am sure most advanced countries would not be ready to swap their current challenges regarding corporate abuse with the challenges we face in African countries.

I grew up in Nigeria in the 1970s when so many things were available to us and we took them from granted. I look around today at the life of an ordinary Nigerian, and all those things I took for granted are no longer available. Each time I look back at those people who led our public service then, I have even more respect and admiration for them. I look at my generation and think: are we going to be remembered as one that provided such poor leadership and destroyed the hope for succeeding generations?

**AA:** If you have a commitment to public service, what is your message, how do you serve?

**AH:** drives that change? Those same values I want to see in a public servant – values of selfless service, integrity, and of course the courage to sometimes take on vested interests and face difficult situations.

Everything that is required for a good leader in the private sector is also required for a good leader in the public sector. The difference is that the reward is not measured in financial terms but rather in terms of the impact that you are creating in the community. You also have to learn that as a leader in the public sector, you cannot get away with a lot of things. However, I am sure most advanced countries would not be ready to swap their current challenges regarding corporate abuse with the challenges we face in African countries.

When I grew up in Nigeria in the 1970s when so many things were available to us and we took them from granted. I look around today at the life of an ordinary Nigerian, and all those things I took for granted are no longer available. Each time I look back at those people who led our public service then, I have even more respect and admiration for them. I look at my generation and think: are we going to be remembered as one that provided such poor leadership and destroyed the hope for succeeding generations?

When Josh Gotbaum graduated with a master’s degree in public policy, he did what he had always intended to do: he went into government, initially as a regulatory official in the Carter administration. But soon afterwards, Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election, and Gotbaum found himself looking for what he thought of as an “interim job”. “I fully expected Reagan to be a one-term president, so I went looking for the opportunity to learn as much about business as I could in four years, so that I could bring that knowledge back into government.”

As events transpired, he ended up spending the next twelve years out of government, initially as a speech-writer to legendary Wall Street icon Felix Rohatyn, and then as an investment executive focused on corporate restructuring and turnarounds. He successfully restructured a series of steel companies, electric utilities, and especially airlines. So when he came back to government in 1992 – this time in the Department of Defense – he had a whole new set of skills to contribute. In what he calls “the biggest industrial enterprise in the world outside of China’s Red Army” — i.e. the Pentagon — he worked on property disposals, base closings and openings, housing privatization, and partnerships with the private sector. That’s how he came to design the model for military family housing stock that exists to this day.

Around this time, Gotbaum made a commitment to himself: he would always make himself available to serve in a Democratic administration, whenever one came to power in Washington. He didn’t know it then, but this simple decision has resulted in him spending roughly half his professional life in government (most recently as head of the pensions regulator), and the other half in business or nonprofits. During the non-government half, he spent two years in New York leading the 9/11 Fund after the 2001 attacks — and another two years in Honolulu, leading Hawaiian Airlines’ recovery from bankruptcy. Gotbaum is one of a small but significant band of tri-sector athletes — people who have built their careers at the intersection of government, business and the non-profit sector, and are comfortable in all three. There may not be many of them — but they include people like Hank Paulson, Tim Gassert, Mark Carney, Paul Tucker and Adair Turner, who led the response to the 2008 global financial crisis; or Steve Radner, Ron Bloom and Diana Farrell, who helped turn around the automotive industry in the teeth of this crisis; or David Hayes and Carol Browner, who led the
response to the Deepwater Horizon crisis in the Gulf of Mexico, drawing upon their experience in business and social activism.

Then there are other remarkable leaders – Justin Welby, who started his career in the oil business and is now Archbishop of Canterbury; Paul Farmer, who started as an epidemiologist and became a leading social entrepreneur with Partners in Health; and Jim Yong Kim, another doctor who worked alongside Farmer at PIH, and went on to lead Dartmouth University and the World Bank.

The need for such tri-sector leaders seems evident when we consider the most vexing problems of our time – international terrorism, income inequality, climate change, infrastructure, education, healthcare, crime, and corruption. Complex, multi-disciplinary issues like these typically have multiple stakeholders who hold contrasting and often conflicting views on cause and effect, and have even greater disagreements about viable solutions. Problems such as these cannot be solved by governments alone, nor by commercial or social enterprises, nor by any other single sector of our society. They can only be addressed by government, business and civil society, working together to provide lasting, sustainable solutions. For that to happen, we need more leaders to be tri-sector athletes – able to engage across the divisions between the public, private and non-profit worlds.

Yet, as tri-sector leaders who are needed to address such challenges are becoming more valuable, they are also becoming increasingly scarce and harder to develop. There are all manner of structural and cultural factors that push the sectors further apart – reducing both the supply and demand for people to move between the sectors and build tri-sector capabilities. Perhaps most pernicious is the widening disparity between salaries in business, governments and non-profits, which compound the inherent differences in incentives and cultures between the three sectors. As Jack Donahue, a professor at Harvard Kennedy School has observed, “government is impermeable and business is sticky.”

In most parts of the world, tri-sector leadership is not the prevailing model of success. So for those who are willing to embrace the challenge – as people like Josh Gotbaum have done before them – it requires tough choices, sacrifices and discipline. In the research for my book The Mosaic Principle, I interviewed more than 200 tri-sector leaders – some celebrated, others less so. While few have pursued a clearly defined life plan to be a tri-sector athlete (often protesting that “it just happened that way”), it’s evident that most have made intentional choices in favour of breadth and diversity of experience; and have adopted a series of coping strategies and disciplines to overcome the barriers consciously and sub-consciously placed in the way of a tri-sector life.

Other than financial compensation, the most persistent barrier has been uncertainty about whether skills gained in one sector can and should be transferred to another. After all, professionals in each of the three sectors do quite different things – business executives allocate scarce resources to capture attractive market opportunities; government executives create legal and policy frameworks to execute the prevailing political philosophy; and non-profit leaders devise creative ways to further the social good. Josh Gotbaum has become quite pessimistic about the challenge of transferrable skills – “I’m just not convinced that there is much demand in government for skills learned in business.”

So people like Gotbaum have to work doubly hard to transfer skills gained in one sector into another – skills like financial analysis, budgeting, and change management. Gotbaum and other tri-sector leaders have overcome these barriers by underpinning their generic skills with an intellectual thread – an area of specific expertise that is of evident (and sometimes premium) value to another sector. In his case, it was his expertise in corporate turnarounds, especially in the airline industry, that government needed when it came to releasing funds from military housing stock, and later in handling the pension consequences of airline bankruptcies.

Even where these “hard skills” are appreciated and valued, there may still be a resistance barrier when it comes to “soft skills” like culture and values. I have certainly witnessed at first hand the cringe effect that unfolds when business executives start talking to government officials about “leveraging their assets” or “optimising their portfolio”. This is not just a matter of speaking in different languages – governments, and especially non-profits, are mission-driven institutions, and need to be respected as such.

Roger Sant, a veteran tri-sector athlete, who started in government and went on to build a world-leading electric utility and run several environmental non-profits, cautiously observes: “You know there is an element of truth in the belief that business leadership skills can be transferred to political leadership – but it’s probably best not to exaggerate it. I did have leadership roles that could be relevant – but I realise that doesn’t give me all the tools. I know I don’t have all the answers”.

And more than a few budding tri-sector athletes run aground in the domain of cultural values and norms – even of morality and ethics. Real or perceived conflict of interest has bedeviled those who have gone through the revolving door between government and business for centuries – it was, for instance, a persistent criticism of Alexander Hamilton and several of America’s founding fathers. And recent corporate scandals – with or without the specific taint of conflict of interest – have only strengthened the resistance to business experience in government.

That’s a shame – but it will only be overcome by successive generations of people with a proven moral compass, making the transition into and out of government without blemish. And what such people will need above all is what Louis Pasteur famously called a prepared mind – or more fully: “In the fields of human observation, chance favours only the prepared mind.”

Successful tri-sector athletes like Josh Gotbaum have a mind prepared for the moral complexity and ethical conflict that tend to accompany a tri-sector career. They have a set of generic core skills that travel with them between different sectors, reinforced by a specific intellectual thread – a mix of broad and deep expertise that is best characterised as the T-shaped Approach. And they know how to adapt quickly to different, even contrasting, cultures – recognising the important differences and similarities with what they have experienced before.

To paraphrase President Kennedy, we choose to be tri-sector leaders not because it is easy, but because it is hard. But for those who are willing to take it on, life as a tri-sector athlete can be rich, fulfilling and fun. As Steve Ratner observed after his experience as the “Car Czar” in government, “What I have observed about myself is that I like having a multi-dimensional tri-sector life and career. It may not be the best way to knock the cover off the ball in any one thing. But it allows you to translate what you’ve learned in one arena into another. And you get to serve.”

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