Non-Hierarchical Ethical Conduct by Public Sector Workers:
Notes to accompany the ASPA DSJ webinar on
Promoting Ethical Conduct in Organizations

David S. Reed
David.Reed@PubAdmin.org

1.   Scope

These notes are about situations where a worker acts to do what she sees as right, without support of her supervisor.

2.   The best place to start
Rosemary O'Leary (2019) The Ethics of Dissent: Managing Guerrilla Government, 3rd ed.

O'Leary coined the term "guerrilla government" for
"actions taken by public servants who work against the wishes—either implicitly or explicitly communicated—of their superiors."

The book describes numerous cases; for example, employee of an environmental agency working with advocacy groups to oppose the policies of the agency's management.

There are additional topics in the literature that can be included in teaching about non-hierarchical ethical action by public sector workers:

3.   Organizational Citizenship, Voice, and Change-Oriented Behavior

This body of research examines workers acting beyond their prescribed job duties, to improve their organization.

Vigoda-Gadot and Beeri (2011) – Employees whose supervisors practiced transformational leadership (inspiration and vision) exhibited *less* change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior than employees whose supervisors practiced transactional leadership (rewarding employee performance).

Hassan (2015) – Employees who saw their supervisors as ethical, and who felt control in the workplace, engaged in more improvement-centered voice. The implication is that employees did not refrain from complaining and suggesting because they were satisfied, but because they viewed their supervisor as unethical and themselves as powerless.

4.   Innovation

Borins (2000a; 2000b; 2014) – Analyses of projects that were entered in awards programs for government innovations. Findings include the roles of middle managers and frontline staff in creating innovations, compared to politicians and agency heads.

5.   Communities of Practice

Binz-Scharf, Lazer, and Mergel (2012) – Case study of networks of practice among workers in state and municipal DNA forensic laboratories. Findings include the role of in-person meetings to create trust that facilitates future on-line information sharing.

vonHippel (2007) – Grounded theory findings on the conditions that support innovation among users of a technology, rather than innovation diffusing hierarchically from producers to users.

6.   Shadow IT

Allen et al. (2017) – Experimental finding that "managers administer significantly lower bonus amounts to an employee who uses a shadow IT system than to an employee who uses the company-endorsed system. This result holds regardless of outcome favorability"

7.   Unauthorized Demonstration Projects

There doesn't seem to be any academic literature on this yet, but I am developing some case studies.

- SCOTUS Servo – Tracking changes to U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

- Public database of U.S. government agencies' Inspector General reports https://oversight.garden/ -.

- Public database of Virginia corporate registration data https://blog.opencorporates.com/2016/08/01/24-months-3000-1-cake-how-virginias-company-data-was-opened-up/

- World café events on diversity at USDA Forest Service. https://www.dm.usda.gov/docs/news/MyUSDA%20August%202015.pdf

8.   References

Allen, Drew, F. Greg Burton, Steven D. Smith, and David A. Wood. 2017. "Shadow IT Use, Outcome Effects, and Subjective Performance Evaluation." SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 2993443. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2993443.

Binz-Scharf, Maria Christina, David Lazer, and Ines Mergel. 2012. "Searching for Answers Networks of Practice Among Public Administrators." *The American Review of Public Administration* 42 (2): 202–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074011398956.

Borins, Sandford. 2000a. "Loose Cannons and Rule Breakers, or Enterprising Leaders? Some Evidence About Innovative Public Managers." *Public Administration Review* 60 (6): 498–507. https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-3352.00113.

———. 2000b. "What Border? Public Management Innovation in the United States and Canada." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19 (1): 46–74. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6688(200024)19:1<46::AID-PAM4>3.0.CO;2-Z.

Borins, Sandford F. 2014. *The Persistence of Innovation in Government*. Brookings Institution Press with Ash Center for Democratic Governance and …. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=hKqeAwAAQBAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA66.w.1.1.12.

Campbell, Jesse W. 2018. "Workgroup Accord and Change-Oriented Behavior in Public Service Organizations: Mediating and Contextual Factors." *Journal of Management & Organization*, September, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2018.42.

Hassan, S. 2015. "The Importance of Ethical Leadership and Personal Control in Promoting Improvement-Centered Voice among Government Employees." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (3): 697–719. Ungated at: https://glenn.osu.edu/faculty/glenn-faculty/hassan/hassan-attributes/J%20Public%20Adm%20Res%20Theory-2015-Hassan-697-719.pdf.

O'Leary, Rosemary. 2019. *The Ethics of Dissent: Managing Guerrilla Government*. Third Edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.

Vigoda-Gadot, Eran, and Itai Beeri. 2011. "Change-Oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Public Administration: The Power of Leadership and the Cost of Organizational Politics." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, September. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mur036.

vonHippel, Eric. 2007. "Horizontal Innovation Networks--by and for Users." *Industrial and Corporate Change* 16 (2): 293–315. http://icc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/doi/10.1093/icc/dtm005.