

Leadership Development Program for Utility Commissions

"At the end of the day, it is the wisdom of the organization's decisions that determines whether it lives or dies."
- William Wigglesworth, developer of the Office of Telecommunications (OfTel), U.K.

Utility commissions face unique leadership challenges as they help governments, citizens, and utilities confront new realities, such as volatile energy prices and new business models for telecommunications, while balancing interests, maintaining objectivity, and providing the stability and continuity that elected officials, investors, and customers demand. Not just surviving this leadership role, but thriving in it, is hard because regulators can find themselves in situations where long-held traditions are challenged, powerful interests seek influence, regulators can become scapegoats, and commissioner turnover works against long-term agency development.

This program assists regulatory commissions in building organizations that thrive and consistently produce superior results. Through this program, participants will:

- Learn how to develop a successful organization
- Gain practical experience in distinguishing between technical and adaptive challenges,¹ between authority and leadership, and between thinking politically and being political
- Develop and practice the skills for adaptive leadership
- Discover how to identify and use their personal strengths and others' strengths
- Develop skills for leading and managing themselves, as well as others
- Learn to identify emerging challenges and create an adaptive culture

Approach

The program includes a preliminary meeting and four workshops spread over four months, but the approach can be modified to meet individual circumstances. It is intended for a group of 10 to 20 participants, who could be any combination of commissioners, senior managers, or prospective managers. Workshops are preceded by required readings and homework, and are followed by group activities and personal exercises. Readings and exercises are directly applicable to commission work.

Program Outline

Preliminary Meeting (1/2 day)

1. Purposes and approaches to regulation
2. Characteristics of a great regulatory agency
3. Forms of listening: downloading, debating, reflective dialogue, and generative dialogue
4. Plan for the program

Workshop 1 (2 days)

Module 1: Profile of a Successful Organization

1. Formal and informal roles of the regulatory agency
2. Leadership and authority

¹ Adaptive challenges arise when fundamental changes in the environment call for the organization to rethink basic goals and strategies. Technical challenges are those where there is general agreement on the existence and nature of the problem and work can be dealt with by subject matter experts. Distinguishing between technical and adaptive challenges and engaging people in adaptive work are key challenges in leadership.

3. Technical and adaptive work
4. Being worthy of your role
5. Level 5 Leadership: Sustaining a great organization beyond your tenure

Module 2: Leading Yourself

1. Key strengths for those in leadership roles
2. Using your strengths in the organization
3. Developing your own technical and leadership skills
4. Getting and applying feedback from others

Workshop 2 (2 days)

Module 3: Leading the Organization

1. Increasing social competence, including awareness of others and adeptness at influencing and working with others
2. Recognizing and developing others' strengths
3. Organizational values and ideologies
4. Creating a compelling vision

Module 4: Creating an Adaptive Organization

1. Key characteristics of an adaptive organization: Shared accountability; Smart risk taking; Facing the brutal facts; Discussing the elephants in the room
2. Crucial conversation skills
3. Preserving core values while stimulating progress

Workshop 3 (2 days)

Module 5: Leading Adaptive Work

1. Recognizing adaptive challenges
2. Taking a balcony viewpoint
3. Orchestrating adaptive work
4. Political awareness
5. Staying in the game

Module 6: Leading Others

1. Negotiation skills
2. Stakeholder relationships
3. Practice in thinking politically
4. Systems thinking

Workshop 4 (1 day)

Module 7: Personal Assessment and Continuing Development

1. Using leadership and authority to shape the regulatory agency
2. Recognizing your piece of the mess
3. Orchestrating the work while maintaining political awareness
4. Long term planning for building and maintaining a great organization

Pedagogy

The program makes extensive use of readings, exercises, group projects, peer consulting, and personal reflection. During the program participants will read several books and articles by prominent authors in the fields of regulation, leadership, and management. Participants will learn from formal case studies and extensive application of case in point, in which the group studies its own functioning to understand key principles in leadership and management.

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