Guerrilla Employees: Should Managers Nurture, Tolerate or Terminate them?

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Road Map

- Define “Guerrilla Government”
- Provide examples
- Explain my approach
- Highlight 4 big cases of guerrilla government
- Pass on advice from the pros
- Present questions to ask before you become a guerrilla
Guerrilla What?

Guerrilla Government: My term for *career public servants* who act against the wishes – either explicitly or implicitly communicated – of their superiors

Idea for research came from my years in government
Guerrilla Government

Most guerrillas not whistleblowers

Choose to work behind the scenes

Most of the cases I studied: Driven by policy differences and personal sense of ethics, not corruption
Examples of Guerrilla Government

- Obey your superiors in public, but disobey them in private
- Leak information to the media
- Cultivate positive relationships with interest groups
- Ghostwrite letters, testimony and studies
- Contact elected officials
Examples of Guerrilla Government

- Neglect policies and directives you disagree with – stall
- Fail to implement orders you think unfair
- File a complaint with an investigative office
- Hold clandestine meetings to plot a unified staff strategy
- Fail to correct superiors’ mistakes
Examples of Government Guerrillas

- Chiune Sugihara
- Mark Felt
- EPA employee who shows up at public meeting and criticizes EPA policy
- State of California Department of Transportation employee who repairs railroad gate against wishes of his superiors
Central Thesis of Book

- Guerrilla Government happens all the time

- Manifestation of inevitable tensions between bureaucracy and democracy that will never go away

- Yields immense ethical and management challenges, as well as harsh realities
Three Lenses

Bureaucratic Politics

Ethics

Organizations & Management
Bureaucratic Politics

- Bureaucrats make policy through the exercise of discretion (Appleby, 1949)
- Driven by own parochial views, interests, values (Long, 1949)
- Co-optation (Selznick, 1949)
- Influenced by unique culture of agency (Halperin and Kanter, 1973)
Bureaucratic Politics

- Politics of expertise (Benveniste 1973)
- Capacity to initiate, innovate, sustain (Lewis, 1977)
- Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucrats*, 1980
- Execucrat Public administration is political
- Policy entrepreneurs (Riccucci, 1995)
Organizations and Management

Organizations are shaped by and seek to shape their environment (Cyert & March 1963)

- Open systems
- Organization culture
- Democratic organizations
- Networks
- Collaborative public management
Ethics

- Personal Ethics
- Organizational Ethics
- Professional Ethics
- The Problem of Ambiguity (Fleishman 1981; Rohr 1986; Cooper 1998; Gawthrop 1998; Dobel 1999)
- Whose ethics?
Ethics: 12 Ethical Obligations of Public Servants (Waldo 1988)

- Constitution
- Law
- Nation
- Democracy
- Organization
- Profession

- Family/friends
- Self
- Middle range collectives
- Public interest
- Humanity
- God
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Self
My methods

- “Elusive Subject”
- Hidden populations
- Hard to reach
- Public acknowledgement of being part of the population is potentially threatening
Other Studies of the Elusive

- Crack dealers
- Deviance in business organizations
- Sexual networks
- HIV transmission
- Cigarette black markets in prisons
- Employee theft
Other Studies of the Elusive

- Workplace revenge
- Employee deviance
- Pirated goods
- Deception in weapons testing
- Unreported economy
- Tax non-compliance
Comparison of my methods to Others’ methods

- Participant Observation
- Structured Interviews
- Unstructured Interviews
- Stories People Tell
- Self Completion Surveys
- Published Sources
- Lab Experiments (students)
- Extrapolation of Indicators
Guerrilla Government in the Nevada Wetlands

Successfully got bill passed by Congress against wishes of superiors

- Marketed cause
- Clandestine lobbying
- Fund raising
- “Embarrass the government!”
- Public-Private-NGO partnerships
- Ghost wrote letters of protest/support
Guerrilla Government in the U.S. EPA’s Seattle Regional Office

Fought directives of new political appointees

- Secret staff meetings to plot a unified strategy
- Filed complaints with Inspector General
- Leaked information to press and environmental groups
- Failed to implement orders
Guerrilla Government in the U.S. Forest Service

Sued own agency to halt policy allowing off-road-vehicles (ORVs) in forest

- Forged alliances with interest groups
- Issued press releases
- Rallied local community in support
- Wrote letters to politicians
- Encouraged newspaper articles in his favor
Guerrilla Government in the U.S. Army

Private First Class Chelsea (Bradley) Manning leaked hundreds of classified government documents to WikiLeaks.

- Largest security breach in the history of the world.
- Exposed government corruption around the world as well as petty details
- Triggered Arab Spring protests
- Considered both a 21st-century Tiananmen Square-like hero and a crazed traitor (Nicks 2012).
YOUR EXAMPLES?
Harsh Reality #1

Guerrilla Government is here to stay.
Harsh Reality #2

Guerrillas can do it to you in ways you’ll never know.
Harsh Reality #3

All Guerrilla Government activity is not created equal.
Harsh Reality #4

Most public organizations are inadequately equipped to deal effectively with Guerrilla Government.
Harsh Reality #5

The tensions inherent in Guerrilla Government will never be resolved.
Guerrilla Government:

Ethical or Insubordinate?
The Value of Dissent
(US survey of 200 managers)

- Diversity of viewpoints
- Positive change
- Rigorous thinking
- Innovation
- Prevent catastrophes
- More positive workplace
- Employee satisfaction
Create a positive organization culture that accepts, welcomes, and encourages candid dialogue and debate.

Create a questioning attitude by encouraging staff to challenge the assumptions and actions of the organization.
Advice from the Pros #2

Listen.
Advice from the Pros #3

Understand the formal & informal organization.
Advice from the Pros #4

Separate the people from the problem.
Advice from the Pros #5

Create multiple channels for dissent.
Advice from the Pros #6

Create dissent boundaries and know when to stop.
Questions to Ask Before You Become a Guerrilla

- Is the feared damage immediate, permanent, and irreversible? Are safety and health issues involved?

- Am I adhering to the rule of law?

- Is there a legitimate conflict of laws?
Questions to ask yourself…

- Is this an area that is purely and legitimately discretionary?

- Were all reasonable alternative avenues pursued?

- Would it be more ethical to promote transparency rather than working clandestinely?
Questions to ask yourself...

- Would it be more ethical to work with sympathetic legislators before turning to media and outside groups?

- Is whistle-blowing a preferable route?

- Am I correct?
Guerrilla Government:

Ethical or Insubordinate?