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Essay 7: The Agency Report

A public manager is a person who implements the government policy. He or she is the one who is responsible to carry on a plan or a project for the government. At the same time, he or she also has to encourage his or her staff to strive willingly for the goal of that organization. Therefore, a variety of job activities for a public manager requires considerable expertise, i.e., multiple duties, many specific job skills, and wide-ranging responsibilities. I have a chance to interview Roland A Rivera, the city planner of Palo Alto, and it emphasizes the feeling that being an excellent public agency must be intelligent and skillful. As a city planner, Roland has to evaluate the current plan whether or not it is appropriate, and as a project manager, another job assignment, he has to prepare data to perform the comprehensive plan for the future by holding the public meeting and collecting people opinions. Then he has to prepare assessments and reports for his director and the City Council to make a decision. For me, dealing such complicated data and diverse situations efficiently and effectively is quite impressive. To answer the question that what I learn about public administration from this research, I will detail his job duties, responsibilities, knowledge/skills, and problems and then I will focus on the answer that what I get from his administration experience.

Roland is thirty-six years old, not so tall but good-looking. He is a Filipino but has been in the U.S. since sixteen years old. He started his career in the associate city planner in the City of Palo Alto seven years ago, right away after he got a degree from U.C. Berkeley in geography and urban planning, and now he is the city planner.

We started talking about his career life early in the morning on 24 March, 2006. City of Palo Alto is in Santa Clara County, and there is a city manager to be the head of the public agency. The city has many departments, one of which is the Planning Department. Roland is a city planner in the Long Range Planning Division of the Planning Department. His major duties can be divided in two parts: As a city planner, he has to evaluate the current plans from other departments and correct them back to the owners. As a project manager, he has to prepare data for the comprehensive plan: The comprehensive plan is the master plan for the City of Palo Alto. It is the twelve-year plan, and the next one is due in 2010. It is the primary tool for guiding the future development of the city. It shows the vision of what the city should be like in the future, mostly concerning the quality of safety, utility and beauty. Almost two or three days a week, he and his team, about 15 persons, have to hold the public meeting to collect the data from the residents of the city in every aspect. Then he has to assess the data and present them to his director and the City Council for approval. And later these official data will use to make a new comprehensive plan.

We talked about his knowledge and skills that he has to apply for his job. Roland said he graduated in Geography and Urban Planning. It is the specific knowledge, which is much helpful to him because he already had the basics to make and detail a plan. Also, he has to use the writing skill for writing his report, the customer service skills for interacting with people and the technical skill for presenting his data by computer. He mentioned about the professional and the ethical skill that he has to know every detail of a plan to make a plan practically, and he has to be neutral because the new plan can affect a lot of people.

We also talked about what kind of problems he has to deal with. Roland said the main problem is about people who don't want to lose their advantages or be afraid to lose them. His duty is to make a new plan and he has to collect data from people in his area. Sometimes they are afraid to be changed; therefore, they don't give the right data or they refuse to give them. He said the plan is for the residents of the City of Palo Alto, not for any group. He tried to make it useful for everybody but the result sometimes frustrated him. For example, he wanted to improve some area of the city where it is crowded with factories, he tried to collect the data from people in that area for 6 months, and when he proposed his new plan to the City Council, it was refused because people in that area protested and the council were afraid. He asked me that what I will do if I try so hard for the project for 6 months but nothing happens.

In this research, I can answer the question what I learn about administration from his experience in two respects. One respect is that public administration requires intelligent people who are committed to an ethos of public service. Since public administration is complicated and wide-ranging, a public manager should have many qualifications.

A public manager is a versatile person because his or her job is multiple duties. Like Roland, he has two job duties. As a city planner, he plays the role of a critical thinker who evaluates the current plan and corrects it for other departments. As a project manager, he is a leader who leads his team to collect the practical data from people in the city. Therefore, he has to be flexible and competent to deal with his both duties effectively.

A public manager must have many specific job skills. Since the job activity for a public manager is diverse, many specific job skills are the keys to achieve the aim of any

operation. For Roland, he mentioned that he applied many skills to perform his job task. As he said, I can divide his skills into three categories: First, technical skills—they refer to an understanding to apply techniques for accomplishing tasks. In his case, technical skills are the computer skill and the knowledge from Geography and Urban Planning degree; Second, professional skills—they involve the capacity to work effectively or the ability to influence others to work willingly. In his case, professional skills are the leadership which he applies to lead his team to collect the data, and the way he manages his job to be successful; Third, ethical skills—they refer to the ability to make a right decision when there are opposing ideas, opinions, feeling or wishes are conflicted and it is difficult to choose. In his case, the ethical skill is the way he decides to make a new plan for all residents, not for any group.

A public manager has wide-ranging responsibilities. Being a public manager has to responsible for people and government. To people, he or she has to be concerned about the common good of people. To government, he or she has to carry on the policy or the plan efficiently and effectively. Therefore, a public manager has to reconcile responsiveness for people and efficiency for government. For Roland, he has responsibility to report and recommend his plan to the City Council, and at the same time, he also has responsibility for people to perform the best future plan.

Another respect which I learn about administration from this research is public administration is a profession, and those who work in it believe in the work of government as an institution that serves people's needs. Public administration is a profession: It is a job that needs special training or skills. Hence, a public manager should have a well train and a high level of skills as a professional. Above all he or she has to

take the serious commitment to serve people. Since the goal of public administration is public service, a public manager should dedicate his or her effort to pursue this aim. In this case, Roland proved his professional by showing his high level of job skills that he could handle his job task successfully and also he showed his commitment to serve people by performing a future plan for all residents in the City of Palo Alto. As he said, he tried so hard for six months to generate a new plan for but got nothing.

As I have shown, I interviewed a city planner of Palo Alto. He told me about his career experience which shows his multiple duties, many specific job skills, and wide-ranging responsibilities. He makes me realize that being a public manager is fascinating since he has amazing and various capabilities to handle the job task. Therefore, I can answer the question that what I learn about public administration from this research is that public administration requires intelligent people, administration is a profession, and those who work in it believe in the work of government as an institution that serves people's needs. (1520)