

DISPA CONFERENCE
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LEADERSHIP IN A CHANGING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:

Working Group 3: Leaders as Agents of Change

The days when Public Administration organizations were places of stability and repetition are long past. Today, fluidity and constant change is the norm, in the public sector just as in the world of private business. Within the European Union, in particular, successive legal and institutional reforms, accelerating technological change, an increasingly critical and demanding public and radical economic developments such as the current crisis, pose enormous leadership challenges of a relatively new type: Public Administration leaders throughout the Union – in the EU central Institutions as well as in the individual member states – are called upon to be effective agents of change, both **adaptive change**, in response to already occurring transformations in the environment of their organizations, and **proactive change**, in view of anticipated developments.

Without the timely introduction of the necessary changes, leaders would be unable to sustain their organizations' performance, let alone improve it, as is nowadays demanded of them.

For the purposes of the discussion in Working Group 3, I suggest narrowing down the topic "Leaders as Agents of Change", by:

- (1) concentrating on the **process** of change, leaving aside **content** issues (i.e. focusing on **how** to go about introducing changes, not on **what** changes to introduce), and
- (2) concentrating on substantial and systematically planned change, introduced by leaders holding a considerable degree of institutional authority, rather than on relatively spontaneous, small scale changes, important though these may be cumulatively.

I also suggest that we draw a (preliminary) distinction between two (undoubtedly interrelated) phases of any comprehensive change process: the **initiation** phase, leading to a **change plan** and the **implementation** phase, during which the realization of the plan is attempted. A particular leader may engage (a) in the process of both initiating and implementing a given change, or (b) only in the process of initiating a change which is to be implemented by others, or (c) only in implementing a change initiated by others.

Finally, I propose that in our Working Group discussion we explore both the kinds of **activities** a leader needs to undertake in order to be a successful change agent, and the **qualities and skills** such a leader would need to have.

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In light of the above clarifications, the Working Group might focus on four questions:

- (1) What main **activities** does a leader need to engage in, in order to secure the successful **initiation** of a change process?
- (2) What **qualities and skills** must a leader have, to be able to secure the successful **initiation** of a change process?
- (3) What main **activities** does a leader need to engage in, in order to secure the successful **implementation** of a planned change?
- (4) What **qualities and skills** must a leader have, to be able to secure the successful **implementation** of a planned change?

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