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### Emergent Strategies in Public Organizations: It is Sometimes Easier Done than Said

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## **Emergent Strategies in Public Organizations: It is Sometimes Easier Done than Said**

Many times, public administration scholars and academics in general complicate things unnecessarily. It makes us wonder whether this goes against the saying, “Easier said than done,” and whether it actually should be, “Easier done than said.” Examples abound and cover mentorship relations, development of social capital, networking and building trust. Public administration scholars oftentimes like to think that deliberation in managing human behavior leads to the best results, but in reality, we need to accept the fact that some things just happen and best results are achieved without any interference on our part. This takes us back to the continuously nagging debate about whether the extent strategies implemented in any work organization are deliberate or emergent. Knowing that it is usually a mix of both requires us to give more space and provide the enabling environment for more emergent strategies to develop that may have a positive impact on the work organization.

Deliberate strategies are those that assume a certain end result based on actions implemented by managers and employees. On the contrary, emergent strategies are those that concede to flexibility, accept learning while in operation, realize that things may change while implementation of a pre-set deliberate strategy is taking place, try to anticipate changes, embrace those changes and use them to reach the desired outcomes—all while following a bottom-up approach. The concept of an Emergent Strategy was first introduced by the contemporary Canadian scholar Henry Mintzberg to refer to the idea of how we need to embrace what works in practice.

### ***Mentorship:***

In university setups, oftentimes the natural thing is for faculty to bond with students, especially graduate students who spend lots of time with faculty, whether in classes, during office hours, pondering over thesis questions, following up on progress, discussing life matters, analyzing public affairs or participating in extracurricular activities. The end result of these extended hours spent together is that natural gravitation occurs between students and faculty, the former seeking advice from the latter; a mentor/mentee relationship evolves between them. The relationship is not enforced and the mentee is not assigned to a specific mentor, but rather they find the perfect fit together. Additionally, not every faculty can act as a mentor, and not every student is willing or desiring to seek a mentor. The relationship just emerges. Similarly, junior faculty may seek support and help from senior faculty and the same organic mentor/mentee relationship may develop.

### ***Social Capital:***

Here again lots of analysis gets directed to the dissection of social capital in a societal setup and theories are there to explain how social capital works, its various determinants and how to capitalize on it. In reality, social capital is an artificial term coined by scientists to describe how societal members bond together, help one another and figure their own means of how best to support each other. The term first appeared in a published work in 1916, but became more popular in the year 2000 when the renowned political scientist and scholar Robert Putnam raised an alarm about the dwindling level of social capital in the American society. Since then, more attention was directed to how we can enhance social capital in work organizations through encouraging employees to communicate more with one another and try to build a common identity for their work organization.

### ***Networking:***

People are social creatures and develop organic networks with their friends, peers and acquaintances. Artificially trying to manipulate the development of networks, and thinking of the quid pro quo transactional arrangements to further develop the networks, sometimes may not be the only option to get people with similar interests to share information and ideas for mutual benefit. When people join any organization, they come with their own networks. This should be considered and utilized as a starting point for further development and expansion.

### ***Building Trust:***

Similarly, humans develop trust, or lack of trust, in others innately. You get to know a person, you witness their behavior over time, you observe their ethical conduct and you decide whether to trust them or not and to what extent. With the belief that if employees trust their leaders, they will be willing to exert more effort at work and go beyond the call of duty, organizations exert a lot of deliberate efforts to try to build the level of work trust. Many tips are given to managers and leaders about what they need to do in order to gain and maintain their employees' trust, including listening to them more, being transparent with work plans and procedures and showing appreciation when merited.

For mentoring relationships to develop, networks to expand, social capital to be enhanced and more trust to be exhibited between members of a work organization, let us do less talking and theorizing and more nurturing of the good elements already existing. The seeds are there—they just need to be identified, watered and nourished for best results.