

Public Service Engagement: Resting Ground for Specialized Ability or Garden for Multidisciplinary Talent?

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Abstract

This paper aims to answer the question of whether public service rests on single discipline, specialized ability or multidisciplinary talent. The method used is exploratory by illustration with case examples, some governmentally related, others nongovernmental yet service related. Case series are hypothesis generating, in this instance, identifying the nature of abilities that sustain public service. I support the inferential process with Horvath's tripartite approach [space (e.g., service locale), time (taking into account project evolution), and person (as the center of multiple service projects) models], which raises a number of sub-driving questions. The sequence followed is to first consider whether public service can be either paid or voluntary, then examine whether public service projects are static and delimited or dynamic and evolving, in what way the comprehensiveness of the service demanded varies with one's position with respect to leadership, and whether compounding levels of responsibility entail the evolution of public service involvement for the individual. The examples used, including the author's experience with public health genetic policymaking in the public domain, suggest a flexible notion of public service that is connected with government but need not be or can be indirectly associated. Public service projects and involvement in public service are dynamic when granted the opportunity and at a high level of undertaking show convergence of project efforts. While public service may start out depending on individuals exhibiting single, specialized abilities, multidisciplinary talent is required as projects progress and link together.

Keywords

Public Service, Governmental Service, Nongovernmental Organization,

1. Introduction: Honing-in on Public Service

Individual involvement in public service is often conceived as a commitment to one service avenue at a time or an escalation of involvement with ever-increasing responsibility within a given social area. Specialization is known to have great payoff, as witnessed by Olympic athletes and professors teaching and researching within a chosen field. Is the specialization assumption a fair one to make for service endeavors? Certainly, it would seem to be for volunteers who aspire to reach the pinnacle of service involvement. A Rotary President does not attain this status, a capacity to serve others from the top, by fractioning his or her time to Kiwanis and Lions Club as well. The chair of a publicly oriented action board scarcely has enough time to tie his or her shoes, let alone be involved in other voluntary activities.

However, extracurricular activity that fits the public service description is not necessarily the same as, nor is it meant to be synonymous with job-related or professional activity which demands a fixed modicum of time commitment to one role. Public service involvement may emerge from either personal interests (artistic, cultural, etc.) or an expansion from and branching off of job-related activity, but once generated, it seems to follow its own scheduling and objectives. Public service endeavors pursue a life of their own. Likewise, the payback can be highly gratifying in a personal sense, but unlike many varieties of work typically spreads to others' lives as well.

Investigation of a physical or social phenomenon in the educational setting is often organized around a major driving question and can also be guided by a set of sub-driving questions (Bielik et al., 2018). Such a framework may also be used to examine the nature of public service. This paper is a reflective exploration of public service, asking whether it is principally based upon specialized or generalized talent. This question is motivated by a similar one entertained by many employees—whether it is best to emulate those with super specialized talent or the jack of all trades? The paper does not assume individuals must personally fit into one category or the other, but it does consider that public service roles may require the adoption of specialized or multifold skill sets. Answering the question demands a look at the project or organizational setting as well as the individuals operating within it. The examples used are not intended to represent a typology of involvement but to more deeply fathom the character of public service. In addition to the above driving question, sub-driving questions to be considered are:

- 1) Can work-related and voluntary efforts constitute equally valuable forms of public service?
- 2) Is public service a kind of static, predictable activity for the individual and

organization, or one that is dynamic and evolving?

3) Looking back on the types of satisfying involvement that can be undertaken, what does public service in the organizational setting look like—a collection of individuals exhibiting singular abilities or a set of persons wielding multiple talents?

4) Considering that engagement in public service may evolve with the life of a project and that a hierarchy of talents may be needed, how do service-related experience and talent come together as one becomes committed to public service over a lifetime?

The Methods section will show how these sub-driving questions are linked, and the line of thought in the paper will address, using these questions, the overall question of whether individuals pursuing public service should expect to primarily utilize a special ability or multifold talent in their service career.

2. Methods

The above questions will be addressed by examining multiple case examples. Case series are the basis for generating useful hypotheses (Ibrahim, 1985), in this instance leading to the hypothesis that public service in the life of an individual and organization depends on specialized ability, yet to reach maturity rests on multidisciplinary talent. Toulmin observes, “What is particular in any given case is of course in part the *situation*, but it depends even more on the *person* or people whose lives a case affects... Looking at typical cases, in this sense, we can start by thinking about time-slices in someone’s life history” (Toulmin, 2001: pp. 111-112). This inquiry will cover both the personal and organizational dynamics of public service.

Even more fundamental than scientific hypotheses are the conceptual models upon which they are built. In the broadest sense, scientific models may be either analogic (comparing a phenomenon to a simpler, more visualizable occurrence) or theoretical (used often in the human sciences to explain the behavior of a person or social system) (Hempel, 1965). Horvath asserts that ultimately explanatory models fall into three overarching categories—1) time, 2) space, and 3) person models (Horvath, 1980). These types of models: 1) illustrate the passage from one instance to the next; 2) grant a perspective in which different functions and structures operate; and 3) describe the epistemic subject at the center of every activity. Krettek has applied Horvath’s scheme to the interdisciplinary study of education and work (Krettek, 2012)—it might equally well be applied to the study of public service.

The paper’s first thematic section follows a number of personal stories of public service taking place in particular locales. The section exemplifies the use of a space (or geographic) model using person-based examples that address the first question of whether the services rendered need to be voluntary or work-related. The second thematic section follows three public dialogues that deliver results dealing with health and environmental services. The nature of public dialogues,

in contrast to discussions, is that they advance through time, often lasting a year or more (model 1), providing exemplars of the dynamic nature of public service. The third thematic section examines three organizational examples of public service. These instances illustrate a common multilevel organizational structure (a multilevel model 2 or space model) that, at its base, depends on a swell of specialized individual abilities and at its apex draws on leadership from one or two individuals exercising their cumulative multidisciplinary experience. The author uses the last thematic section to illustrate how in his own case (model 3—a person model), following the journey of public service leads to a convergence of experiences that in the end requires, to fulfill the set of responsibilities assumed, a multidisciplinary perspective and skill set.

3. Exploratory Findings

The sections to follow utilize case examples following Horvath's triad model to answer the principal question of whether public service depends on specialized ability or multidisciplinary talent.

3.1. Work-Related vs. Voluntary Public Service

Public service in its broadest sense may be defined as any service rendered in the public interest (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Such service is intended to address the specific needs of the aggregate members of a population. The initial question to be asked in addressing the dimensions of public service is whether it must be voluntary or can also be a paid role, such as one's occupation. The United States federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) equates volunteering with performing services free of any expectation of compensation (Herman, 2022). However, one must distinguish an unpaid internship at home from giving of one's hours abroad, which requires some basic level of sustenance for fulfilling the service activities demanded. The latter situation nevertheless differs from a work-related situation, which offers incentives for promotion. Despite these differences, the question remains whether both directions, voluntary and work-related, can offer a public service opportunity.

Engagement in public service is best exemplified by committed individuals helping people in a specific locale, social, or cultural setting. While a politician may be in office for a number of personally unique reasons (Representative Debbie Dingell of Michigan has continued and furthered the initiatives of her beloved deceased husband, Representative John Dingell, especially well known for supporting healthcare legislation, and former astronaut Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona carried on the reigns of his wife Senator Gabby Giffords after she was shot), the host of Congressional members would contend they got into the office from the start to address their fellow citizens' needs. Members of Congress and state level politicians address issues and pass laws related to gun violence, violence against women, fighting the e-cigarette, opioid, and obesity epidemics, assuring services to agricultural communities and urban centers, capping drug

prices, optimizing healthcare, and fighting environmental pollution and climate change. These functions are entirely within the realm of public service, and taxpayers and donors pay for them to remain in office. The congressional staffers and legislative aides who conduct research and writing and act as go-betweens with the public are likewise performing a public service, one that is supported by the politician for whom they work.

Public servants may also be drawn from academia; one does not need to be born a politician. The Senate just voted on President Joe Biden's pick for the United States Environmental Protection Agency enforcement chief, David M. Uhlmann (Lee, 2022). Uhlmann spearheads the Environmental Crimes Project, the first comprehensive study of criminal enforcement under U.S. pollution laws. He has been a member of the Michigan Law faculty for 25 years, but was also a member of the U.S. Department of Justice for 17 years, seven as the chief of the Environmental Crimes Section. All of these activities fall under the heading of "work," but they also serve a high cause in public service—environmental justice. It should be noted that laudable occupational activities can also impact the public in indirect, nonremunerative ways—Uhlmann writes op-eds for lay and expert audiences and lectures widely about sustainability issues, having recently served as a speaker at a Dayenu (religious climate movement) event.

The involvements of socially minded doctor Larry Brilliant provide the opposite example of an individual who is heavily ensconced in largely voluntary humanitarian activities. Brilliant volunteered as a medical officer in India for the World Health Organization program that in 1980 led to the certification of smallpox eradication. The effort developed several new health promotion strategies, some streetwise simple, e.g., the instituting of rewards for citizen reporting of cases, some technical, e.g., forming a containment ring around every infected person (Brilliant, 2016). Dr. Brilliant maintains about this kind of activity, "Do the work for the work's sake, for the sake of the children whose lives will be saved, not for your resume, not as a career steppingstone, not so people will say what a wonderful person you are" (Brilliant, 2016: p. 197). In co-founding the Seva Foundation, an international, non-profit health foundation that in developing countries from Nepal to Guatemala has restored sight to more than 4 million blind people, Larry Brilliant has revealed himself to be a modern-day Albert Schweitzer (Keady, 2015). Brilliant was also the Executive Director of Google.org, the philanthropic arm of Google (Hafner, 2006). Dr. Brilliant sums up his philosophy with a paraphrase of the historic Rabbi Hillel, who said that it is our duty to heal a broken world (Hebr.: *tikkun olam*) (Brilliant, 2016: p. 195).

While Larry Brilliant's form of public service is unarguably outstanding, it has parallels in the humanitarian activities of those who work out of the limelight in non-profit organizations at home (AmeriCorps) and abroad (Peace Corps and TechnoServe—business solutions to fight poverty). Such a caring attitude also plays out these days at a local level in those who volunteer their time for carbon neutral projects in cities with plans to fight climate change.

3.2. Dynamic View of Public Service

Involvement in public service can be an individual, isolated activity, e.g., spontaneously volunteering for a personally important cause, but is oftentimes part of a connected series of steps through time for an individual or group. The use of public dialogue to shed light on citizens' views on a meaningful or impactful issue can in time lead to adoption of the results by policymakers, thus serving a public purpose. Adopted policy in turn influences the availability of societal resources.

Sherry Arnstein framed the concept of a “ladder of citizen participation” running the gamut from informing citizenry to consulting with citizens and various forms of partnership (Gaber, 2019; Arnstein, 1969). She cited federal social programs related to urban renewal, antipoverty efforts, and model cities planning in Denver and Philadelphia as participatory examples. The “Dialogue with the City” planning program in Perth, Australia represents a more recent example of citizens making their voices heard, though Stage 2 of the program, plan formulation, was turned over to expert working groups representing local government rather than remaining in the hands of the people (Hopkins, 2010). The Stanford Deliberative Democracy Lab offers a very recent example of public discussion on major issues using online deliberative techniques. The program’s “America in One Room Climate and Energy” event conducted in-depth deliberations on this pressing issue area in December 2021 (Stanford Deliberative Democracy Lab, 2021; Fishkin, 2018). Dialogues have also been used to serve public interests in the healthcare space. These dialogues have migrated from the theme of healthcare allocation in general (Garland & Hasnain, 1990) to more specific topics, such as genomics, biobanks, and precision care (Strange et al., 2020; O’Doherty et al., 2012; Garland, 1999). In the genomics examples to follow this paper will illustrate two ways in which the deliberative technique of public dialogues can engage program participants through a dynamic, interactive process in deciding the shape of public service.

The *Genome Technology & Reproduction: Values & Public Policy* project was launched in 1997 with the goal of developing a series of recommendations guiding the use of new genetic technologies related to reproductive decision-making. The project was funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and represented a collaboration between two major Michigan public research universities and seven Michigan communities. The project sequence started with the holding of exploratory focus groups and the launch of a public survey, transitioned to a series of community dialogues incorporating this preliminary data and yielding issue analyses plus policy recommendations, then concluded with a national conference as part of the dissemination phase. Major areas covered included access to genetic services, informational privacy and confidentiality, balanced use of reproductive technologies, and possible regulatory steps. Over 200 citizens were involved in these dialogues. The project held two policy conferences, one in the Michigan state capitol between the two dialogues seasons; the other in Washington, D.C. at the project’s end. To assure citizen representation

in the reports generated, iterative sessions were held to gather participant feedback on report accuracy and suggested modifications (Dror, 1983); 24/54 participants in the interim policy conference were lay members, and ten of the final policy conference participants were community leaders (Modell & Hartman, 1998; Modell, 1997). The policy conferences were attended by legislative aides and legislators, and the reports the conferences generated were disseminated to both community participants and policymakers. The sequence of steps helped assure the translation of public voices into the policymaking sphere. What began as a funded research project evolved into a public service endeavor for participants and staff members alike.

A later set of public deliberations performed in Michigan addressed issues associated with the use of biobanks to house newborn blood spots for research, an application that had attracted lawsuits in Texas and Minnesota. By 2010 Michigan had collected about 4.5 million dried blood spots without written parental consent (Platt et al., 2014). Issues requiring attention included holding the blood spots long-term, permission to use a child's blood spots for research, and whether consent would be needed every time a blood spot was to be used or a new line of research attempted (Thiel et al., 2014). The end goal of neonatal biobanks is to assure the health of infants and children while respecting newborns' and parents' rights. The Michigan Department of Community Health had conducted focus groups based on location, family child composition, and population race/ethnicity (Duquette et al., 2012). In an attempt to increase respondent diversity further, the University of Michigan Life Sciences and Society program, also under an NIH grant, hosted ten community meetings (educational component plus community consultation) throughout the state. Two of the meetings were held with principally Asian populations; one was conducted with an InterTribal Council; African American participant composition doubled that of the state held focus groups (Thiel et al., 2014). The project had a temporal dimension—the community meetings were preceded by health fair-like engagements with college students and were later followed by an advertising campaign to inform Michigan Facebook users of the issues. By increasing diversity, thus representativeness of the participating population, and directing attention to questions of interest to policymakers, the project could be considered as having a socially beneficial purpose. Members of the organizing team and those connected with the project in nonremunerative ways (community group coordinators, meeting facilitators) felt they were fulfilling a social need that would help avoid the detrimental outcome experienced in other states that led to blood spots' destruction.

Since the above programs generally took place in specific communities, the question arises whether involvement was a matter of “public service,” or of “community service”? Individuals generally perform community service within a specific community or locale, often for a particular institution (school, government, community maintenance, neighborhood protection) and for a limited number of occasions (Difference Between, 2022). The efforts just described took place in

multiple state locations, involved a variety of organizations (community- and faith-based), and extended through time. The projects moved through a number of stages to deliver products that had policy relevance—they were dynamic and socially meaningful, constituting a public service.

3.3. Service Leadership and the Need for Different Degrees of Talent

Public service projects may evolve through time, but if service projects are complex, involving multiple actors, might the actors display their talents to different extents, some more specialized, some more generalized, according to their role within a service organization? Rotary involvement provides a useful example of the structure of public service. Rotarians are involved in providing meals to families away from home while their child is being hospitalized, establishing and maintaining community gardens, mounting campaigns to provide money to globally eradicate polio, conducting PPE delivery to hospitals to fight COVID-19 spread, and provision of money and manpower in developing countries to build infirmaries, install water pumps and toilets, and promote student cultural exchange. These achievements, large and small, reflect a high level of voluntary public service. Rotary gives back to the community and in that sense may be considered a civic organization, but the range and reach of services performed by any particular club and the clubs as a whole suggest it to be the quintessential public service organization. Rotary functions overlap many governmental lines of activity.

Rotary members attend weekly meetings where upcoming activities are announced and members become acquainted with local organizations' undertakings and timely issue areas through delivered talks. These meetings are the springboard for recruiting members into projects. People sign up according to their personal interests, occupational and avocational. Members can also increase their degree of commitment by volunteering to be club officers. Typical roles include treasurer, club accountant, activities director, head of speaker recruitment, and communications officer. Involvement at this level is a matter of one's individual talents, whether one is handy at keeping track of financial spreadsheets and productively investing club dollars, comfortable with handling communications software, or skillful at networking. Taking on an officer role is, thus, a specialized affair relating to one's experiential background.

Rotary International as a whole has a newly elected President every year, but so does each club. The presidential role is based on willingness to invest the requisite time, a great deal of operational experience, and familiarity with membership. The role is multidisciplinary. If a former communications officer steps up, he or she will also be called upon to build on and report about the club's financial well-being and must be steeped in the club's various ongoing projects. If the club president works in environmental management, then they are tasked with seeing to it that members are exposed to a multiplicity of activities and speakers representing local, national, and international (e.g., nearby Canada)

environmental interests. As in other top level executive positions in work and voluntary contexts, the individual must call upon a reserve of past experiences and current knowledge to keep the whole range of operations going. The experience at the top is multidisciplinary.

Many universities (e.g., the University of Michigan, the University of California system, George Washington University) have a community service/public service center that nourishes student growth and yields benefits beyond campus. The Stanford University Haas Center for Public Service connects academic study with community and public service projects. Students can devote time to educating stakeholders and policymakers about climate change through involvement with Citizens' Climate Education, fighting food hunger through the Second Harvest Food Bank, and supporting families facing critical illness through There With Care (Stanford Haas Center for Public Service, 2022). The University also has a related arm for those who are now in the workforce—Stanford Alumni in Public Service. Members' job activities include improving public safety, creating affordable public housing, and helping to manage natural resources. These endeavors reveal the student and alumni membership to be a groundswell of specialized talent.

The student and alumni divisions connected with the Haas program each have a multidisciplinary leadership structure. Student issue area coordinators include an Environmental Sustainability Coordinator, Health Coordinator, and Public Interest Technology Coordinators to interact with marginalized communities. Alumni in Public Service officers include Program/Events Committee officers, an educational Mentor, and Digital Community Managers. These officers oversee and monitor membership activities in general areas, each pertaining to a particular activity sector.

The Haas Center is managed by a Faculty Director and Executive Director. The Faculty Director fulfills both oversight and linking duties. Her activities include leadership in embedding legal clinical services in low-income communities, coordinating diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism efforts, and planning university-community engagement. The Executive Director oversees and coordinates a university-wide program that makes service an essential educational feature, oversees the implementation of a living-learning community focused on public service and civic engagement, and advises and lectures on civic education. These two positions are quite generalized in the skill set required to make public service an activity linking the campus with the surrounding community, a task reaching beyond a specific field or discipline.

Earlier it was pointed out that public service can emerge from either voluntary or work-related origins. The American Public Health Association (APHA) is a professional organization with a socially centered outlook. APHA's mission "is to advance the health of all people and all communities" (i.e., a service function), while it "provides a science-based voice in policy debates too often driven by emotion, ideology or financial interests" (its policymaking function)

(APHA, 2022). Creating health equity is one of its three overarching priorities, reflecting a pervasive interest in the well-being of all community and societal members.

The public health profession is a remunerative one, but involvement with APHA in any number of ways (delivering talks, serving as a section member, etc.) is purely voluntary. Many members first join when hearing their talk has been accepted to present at an upcoming APHA annual meeting. A number of individuals may join as interested members of a student public health organization or state public health affiliate (e.g., the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Michigan Department of Community Health). In either case, the original attraction tends to be based on a specialized purpose to further one's professional advancement. Upon joining, a member is given the option of also joining two APHA sections (e.g., International Health, Public Health Education and Health Promotion) for free. Initially, section membership tends to be a token affair connected with submitting an annual meeting paper to a preferred section. With time one is likely to become involved in section committee activities which have various rewarding professional society and social outcomes, such as the development of school health education guidelines, writing policy statements on topics ranging from suicide prevention to universal healthcare, or sending an "Action Alert" on a personally meaningful health issue to one's senator or Congressional representative. It is at this time that the public service role of the organization becomes activated.

A next step does exist for committed members, and that is heading a committee followed by serving as section chair/co-chair. Like Rotary, section committees tend to require specialized talents, experience, or interests. Typical committees for a section are concerned with abstracts review, policy formulation, communications, and membership. Being a chair or co-chair draws various talents together because this individual or pair of individuals must be familiar with the operation of each committee, occasionally participate in the committee meetings, suggest workgroups when needed, and provide inspiration for centralized projects pertaining to the entire section. The role can have a section-wide impact. For example, the former chair and co-chair of the APHA Genomics Forum started up a genomics education workgroup that led to a list of publications and web resources. This list was utilized for Public Health Genetics Week by the National Coordinating Center (NCC) for the Regional Genetics Networks, which is maintained by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. This event increases public awareness of public health genetics (e.g., clinic locations, state resources, nutrition guidelines, and educational videos). Again, at this level of participation, the role has a public impact, the distinguishing feature being that a multiplicity of skills is required. These two examples suggest that while public service involvement may start as an avenue for harnessing one's specialized abilities, it tends towards further levels of commitment requiring multidisciplinary talent.

3.4. Personal Integration of Public Service Activities

Different individuals may choose to engage in public service at a comfortable, well circumscribed level, assume a degree of organizational leadership, or be involved in high-level coordination. The range of commitment sheds light on whether personal involvement amounts to a singular, highly practiced activity or one that draws on the person's varied arsenal of talents. At this point in the paper, the author will illustrate several threads of his own personal experience to address the question of harnessing single ability vs. multidisciplinary talent in engaging in public service.

As a result of my involvement with the two phases of the Michigan Genomics Policy Project—*Genome Technology & Reproduction: Values & Public Policy*, and the *Communities of Color and Genetics Policy Project* (Bonham et al., 2009), Professor George Alcsér of Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan invited me to participate in a panel responding to a religion and genetic engineering talk by Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner. The talk was situated in the first of a three-part open conference series (2002-2003), “Genetic Frontiers: Challenges for Humanity and our Religious Traditions,” hosted by the National Conference for Community and Justice, Michigan Region and occurring at Marygrove College. Because these events were hosted by a large, national community-based organization, attendance consisting of both public and academic participants was heavy (N = 353 overall), and public concerns (respect for the rights of multiple groups, imperative of educating the public) came to the fore (Modell et al., 2008; Modell, 2007).

I had been working as the Research and Dissemination Activities Director at the Center for Public Health and Community Genomics, University of Michigan, and that role plus my policy dialogues experience led to my serving as scribe and research collator for the second line of genetics dialogues hosted by the University of Michigan's Life Sciences and Society Program. Three interconnected public forums occurring in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 2006 and one separate public dialogue held much later in 2017 all centered on the implications of genomic developments for individuals' lives and group well-being. These public events took place at the Downtown Ann Arbor Public Library and the First Congregational Church, with the series combined totaling 341 participants. Conclusions materializing from these events revolved around implications and alternatives for families and the community, economic burdens, and avoiding disparities. Both the Detroit and Ann Arbor series led to conclusions about which genetic applications would be most acceptable to disparate members of society and recommendations that could inform health professional practice and policymaking (Modell et al., 2019; Modell, 2007). They also served to raise public awareness of the issues.

Faith-based organizations themselves are well known for providing welfare and health services, especially when resources are scarce such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Spiritual Heritage Education Network (SHEN) out of

Waterloo, Ontario, of which I have been a part, engages in community outreach including stress management leadership workshop training to volunteers from nearby communities and colleges, and holding related workshops in hospitals, mental health facilities, and with the incarcerated and ex-incarcerated (SHEN, 2022). Like those churches and temples which host collaborative nutrition, cardiovascular, and cancer health promotion programs (Campbell et al., 2007), these undertakings might most properly be called community services.

During the 2019 annual reflective conference that I attended, SHEN hosted former Canadian Cabinet Minister Bardish Chagger as the keynote, followed by workshops in which attendees discussed pathways to the creation of educational public policy adoption, and strategies to deliver multidisciplinary curricula at different levels stressing human unity. Breakout and whole group sessions and post-meeting follow-up allowed the collation of participant recommendations. This set of group activities and the efforts of each participant had a public service role, one that mapped out steps for future implementation.

The American Public Health Association Genomics Forum has always been a useful setting to present findings of the health projects, public deliberation efforts included, in which I have been involved. Like all professional society involvement, it is occupationally-related yet voluntary. When former President Barack Obama launched the Affordable Care Act in 2010, I responded to a call from APHA Genomics Forum Policy Committee community member Chickezie Maduka to set aside a portion of committee meetings for discussion of groups marginalized from cancer genetic services that stood to benefit from healthcare reform, and I began to amass literature for the Committee. In 2011 I was nominated Co-Chair of the Forum Policy Committee, and Chair in 2012. What had been a background knowledge of economics gradually became a front and center working knowledge. This lens had to be further adjusted with the welfare of multiple groups in mind—racial-ethnic, male-female, and urban-rural. Rather than forming a separate working group, I led the entire Committee in discussion and literature gathering. These activities yielded multiple products, among them a policy statement citing disparities in cancer diagnostic services, accepted and disseminated by APHA in 2013, and published articles dealing with the rights of immigrant groups (Modell et al., 2021) and underserved groups and Medicaid (Modell et al., 2022). These products pertained to group resource access and social justice requiring a multidisciplinary expansion of knowledge, added to by the ground level gaining of experience in group dynamics to see the efforts to completion.

My interest piqued by the exposure to religion and policymaking mentioned above, I joined the Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community affiliated with APHA in early 2021. This group is very energetic, and is currently engaged in writing a policy piece, “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations and Leadership in Improving Global Childhood Vaccinations’ Coverage and Mitigating Vaccination Hesitancy,” for submission to APHA. I had previously conducted a poster

presentation and engaged in a roundtable with the Caucus. The American Public Health Association Action Board had an opening for an at-large caucus and special primary interest group member, and in joining the Caucus, I also had the opportunity to join and represent it and other APHA bodies on the Action Board. Election to the Board was speeded by leadership experience with the Genomics Forum. This new role has required a further expansion of personal skills (arranging Zoom meetings, learning to divide time between represented bodies, connecting with legislators and legislative aides, writing a successful op-ed—way different than academic papers) and knowledge content (climate action, gun control, federal agency budget priorities, areas I had not previously explored in any detail). It is my understanding from talking with Rotary club past presidents and APHA board members that further opportunities exist to serve. I have learned through time that occupying positions of responsibility in public service entails taking full advantage of one's knowledge base and building upon it content-wise and through working with people and groups.

4. Discussion

No mandate exists that a public service effort must require multiple categories of talent. A literature review of multidisciplinary health efforts spanning publications between 1982 and 2006 concluded, “While multiple disciplinary teamwork is appropriate for complex problems, it is not always necessary in every single project” (Choi & Pak, 2006). Public services can be highly defined, carving out one particular area for action and doing the best job possible within that domain. Nevertheless, individuals always have the opportunity to undertake projects or project series which require different levels of multidisciplinary knowledge and skill.

Literature has taken note of shifts in service delivery models. A contrast exists between “old public administration,” which follows a hierarchical model of control, and the “new governance model,” which emphasizes inter-organizational relationships and multi-actor policymaking (Sicilia et al., 2016). Authors have likewise distinguished the merits of “top-down” versus “bottom-up” approaches to service management (Team Asana, 2021; Dodds & Paskins, 2011). Arnstein's “ladder of citizen participation” and the deliberative projects cited in this paper depict a decentralized, participatory approach towards service decision-making. As projects and service divisions become part of a comprehensive enterprise built on multiple undertakings, participants may be expected to bring to bear specialized or multidisciplinary talent according to their specific roles.

In reviewing the four posited sub-driving questions, this paper has concluded that: 1) work-related (generally non-profit) and voluntary effort are equally valid ways of engaging in public service; 2) public service projects and commitments can have multiple stages—they may be dynamic; 3) the range of knowledge and skills demanded thickens as one assumes greater responsibility; and 4) over time, the individual engaged in public service will encounter opportunities to develop and utilize a multidisciplinary knowledge base and skill set.

5. Conclusions: Contrasts and Directions for Engagement

Based on the examples offered in this paper, public service depends on single discipline specialized ability, but ultimately demands the use of multidisciplinary talent with increasing opportunity to fulfill public service roles. The Horvath model provides a useful approach to organizing increasingly complex instances of public service. This exploration has also invoked practical models from service science to explain the structure of service operations. A number of contrasting concepts were examined along the way—voluntary vs. paid service, public service organization vs. civic organization, and public service vs. community service. Public service can be governmental, but it need not be. If it is governmental, then giving time to this kind of endeavor can either be through direct involvement in the reigns of government or through relating to government from the vantage of an outside organization.

Worklife can be viewed as a linear, well-defined operation that remains essentially uniform from day to day, though this conception is a vast oversimplification given the variety of work opportunities that exist. Public service, likewise, can settle into a secure, well-rehearsed set of duties, or it can reveal complexity and require increasing nimbleness. The hidden message is that in performing public service one need not remain in a fixed position; sometimes it is healthy to take on new possibilities for the sake of growth. Everyone exists along a continuum in the sense of proceeding to the next step, and throughout a lifetime, one person's ceiling of responsibility is another's floor. The personal example provided suggests that at a certain critical stage, the various service activities undertaken can converge, integrating the individual's experience with public service. If ever there were an arena where multiple talents are called for, public service fits that description.

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Author Contribution

The author was solely responsible for the selection of examples and references used in this paper and for the paper's writing.

IRB Approval

As an exploratory piece consisting of case examples already appearing in the public domain, this exploration is exempt from IRB approval at my institution.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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