

Emotional Governance

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Abstract

This paper takes some recent ideas developed in academic studies of politics and the media, and combines them with a psychological approach to understanding the relationship between leaders and the public. The result is a new language for describing political leadership, and a contribution to the development of a new style of leadership. This new style is not mere style, but carries with it a change of substance, in a growing concern for the emotional dimensions of the public and its opinions, and of the political issues which confront us. There are already signs that this development is spontaneously underway, but this paper argues for a more strategic approach, which it calls '*emotional governance*', a deliberate and sophisticated attention to the emotional dynamics of the public.

The general concept of 'governance' is attracting interest at present from growing numbers of academics in various disciplines. Those working in social theory, psychoanalysis, media and cultural studies have tended in the past to generate critique of, and often outright opposition to, the policies and agendas of governments. This thinking has its academic sources in those disciplines, yet it identifies with the project of governance. As such, perhaps this paper is part of a post-9/11 shift in the concerns of some intellectuals (though its basic ideas had been developed prior to that date), a shift towards an appreciation of the value and the difficulties of democratic governance. Nonetheless the analysis to be offered here notes the general failure of the political classes to move emotionally with the times. It also foregrounds a highly critical assessment of the role of political journalism in contributing to the currently poor quality of emotional governance.

Amongst the most difficult and pressing tasks facing many governments now is the management of social tensions and conflicts flowing from globalisation, around issues of global terrorism and how to understand and respond to it, inter-faith and inter-ethnic relations, immigration, and attitudes to the nation-state and to its democratic institutions. The need for sound emotional governance is particularly acute around these issues. But so also is the resistance to it from many sides. Overcoming this will require new skills from leaders, and new attitudes amongst the public.

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