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Book Review

Creating New Approaches to Governance in the Decades Ahead

Transforming American Governance: Rebooting the Public Square, edited by Alan P. Balutis, Terry F. Buss, Dwight Ink

Reviewed by Mark A. Abramson

The examination of public management, public administration and governance is indeed a challenge today. The political landscaping keeps changing at a rapid pace, as well as does the major issues and problems of the day. In a short two year period, public servants have gone from “being cool again” to receiving major criticism for their implementation of government regulations and government programs. Understanding how and when this shift occurred is a major topic in the new volume edited by Alan P. Balutis, Terry F. Buss and Dwight Ink, *Transforming American Governance: Rebooting the Public Square*. The volume is the 12th in the National Academy of Public Administration’s Transformational Trends in Governance and Democracy book series published by M.E. Sharpe.

The Balutis, Buss and Ink volume is a valuable addition to the public administration literature on two fronts. First, the book addresses the “drivers” of change in governance over the past two decades and summarizes key public management developments in that time period. Second, the volume also peers ahead to examine what governance might look like in the United States over the next two decades.

The Present: How We Got Here

The opening chapter by Buss, Balutis, and Ink, “American Governance 3.0: Issues and Prospects,” is an excellent recapping of major recent trends and themes in public management. The chapter should be required reading for all public administration students and new civil servants. It provides an overview of what the authors term “signal events” of the past twenty years, including a summary of Obama’s first two years in office which includes descriptions of the

Administration’s health care reform, stimulus package, energy policy, and regulatory activism. The chapter also provides an overview of the new public management and describes the major management initiatives of the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations. The chapter concludes with a brief examination of the health of our governmental institutions.

While the Buss, Balutis, and Ink brings the reader up to date on major public administration developments over the past two decades, the chapter by F. Steve Redburn, “Experts and the Fiscal Challenge: Strategies of Influence,” describes the major actors currently involved in the debate over the nation’s fiscal future. Redburn presents three influence strategies that these experts can use in influencing the debate over the nation’s deficit.

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Two other chapters also focus on how government got here to where it is today. In his chapter, “Governance Implications of the Bush Administration’s War on Terror,” Nathaniel Buss describes the new national security initiatives which moved Governance 2.0 into the “relatively unknown territory of Governance 3.0.” In his chapter, “Effective Governance: Withering Without Federalism,” John Kincaid summarizes major changes in federalism over the past two decades.

Looking Ahead: New Approaches to Public Management

In addition to looking at the past and present, the volume looks ahead to the future. In his chapter, “Crisis, Governance, and the Administrative State in Post-Neoliberal World,” Robert F. Durant presents “seven Rs” if a “government out of sight” continues to be the mantra of the American public. The seven Rs include reconceptualizing purpose; reconnecting with stakeholders, partners, and citizens; redefining administrative rationality; recapitalizing assets; reengaging resources; revitalizing democratic constitutionalism; and restoring trust.

A major theme throughout the volume is the need for new types of collaboration in our governance systems. Four of the chapters in the book focus on collaboration:

- Tom Stanton, in his chapter “Improving Collaboration by Federal Agencies,” discusses the need for government to solve problems which go beyond organizational boundaries. Stanton offers an astute analysis of the distinction between coordination and collaboration. He concludes that increased collaboration between agencies is now essential to building a more capable government which can respond to the “plethora of changing circumstances that raise problems that a single federal agency cannot address by itself.”
- Thom Reilly and Robert Tekniepe, in their chapter “Collaborative Regional Networked Systems,” address the need for such networks which they describe as “incorporating horizontal relationships designed to increase the efficiency of delivering shared public services by partnering governmental agencies with non-governmental agencies.” Reilly and Tekniepe argue that creating effective governance in the interconnected web of cities, counties, and suburbs “will require bold approaches and new institutional arrangements that rely on dynamic and

Book is a Worthy Addition to Series

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rich networks of governmental and non-governmental actors.”

- Alan Shark, in his chapter on “Turning Citizen ‘Engagement’ into Citizen Engagement: Managing Expectations with Web 2.0 and Social Media,” focuses on the need to find new types of engagement with citizens through the use of social media. Shark sets forth three key principles that local governments can adopt: engaging the unengaged; facing government vs. the face of government; and increasing civic engagement.
- Lena Trudeau, in her chapter “The Evolution of Collaboration,” sets forth a roadmap for government organization to create a more collaborative government: create an environment that is open and networked; develop models for collaborative teams and approaches; update laws and policies; learn by doing, smartly; and celebrate and learn from failure.

A major strength of the volume is that it topics include examinations of government at all levels: federal, state, and local. In their chapter, “Will New State Government Management Models Emerge from the Economic Crisis,” Susan Urahn and W. Frederick Thompson forecast potential budget adjustments and strategies which states can undertake to respond to their current fiscal challenges. In his chapter, “A New Kind of Public Square for Urban America, Norman Jacknis tackles the future of cities and suburbs in the decades ahead.

A major premise of many of the chapters included in the volume is that government will have to change in the future and develop new approaches to governance. In their chapter, “Design Lessons for Smart Governance and Infrastructure,” Erik Johnston and Derek Hansen present six levers for future governance: organize around specific problems, crowdsource, provide

meaningful pathways to contribute, encourage engagement, coordinate decentralized effort, and provide open access to useful data and tools in useable formats.

The volume is especially strong in addressing future governance issues at the federal level of government. In his chapter, “Reforms Needed to Meet Future Challenges,” Dwight Ink presents a clear management agenda for the administration starting in January 2013, either the second term of Barack Obama or the first term of a Republican President. Building on his first-hand experiences in government, Ink describes the challenge of mobilizing interagency resources for large undertakings.

Most importantly, Ink poses the question, “Is Government Reform a Pipe Dream?” In answering this question, Ink examines problems that have substantially weakened past such efforts, such as failure to base reform on the facts, slowness in gearing up, poor congressional relations, poor utilization of the career civil service, undervaluing the role of political appointees, and failure to build effective political-career partnerships. Based on this insightful analysis, Ink recommends the establishment of a new office of management to provide leadership on government management and organization issues.

Throughout its 21 chapters, *Transforming American Governance: Rebooting the Public Square* provides many important insights and recommendations on building new governance models for 21st century. It is a worthy addition to the National Academy of Public Administration’s Transformation Trends book series.

Mark A. Abramson is president, Leadership Inc. He is the co-author (with Paul Lawrence) of the forthcoming Paths to Making a Difference: Leading in Government (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.) Email: mark.abramson@thoughtleadershipinc.com.