

Let's Hear It For Dusty, Musty, And Fusty:

Rediscovering Good Government

从枯燥、过时和陈腐中倾听：重新发现好的政府

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Abstract

The New Public Management is public administration's latest iteration about what it should be doing. The New Public Management promotes many good ends, but the price of these benefits may be one of overlooking or disregarding some old-fashioned fundamentals, notably governmental honesty and competency. Examples of these oversights are given in the context of contemporary political corruption and governmental incompetence. A case is made for rediscovering public administration's mission of yesteryear, Good Government.

Public administration once again is embracing a new and modish notion about what it should be doing. We have been down this road before. Remember the days of "dominion of political science over public administration.... [its] strange and unnatural child," that flourished during the 1940s and 1950s (Martin 1952, 665, 660)? How about the New Public Administration of the 1960s and 1970s? Or the Reinventing Government movement of the 1980s and 1990s?

Today, we welcome the New Public Management, which, without question, has made its mark. A survey federal, state, and local agencies in the United States found that only 10 percent "had no experience" with the concepts and techniques that we largely associate with the New Public Management (Durst and Newell 1999, 96).

To be sure, the New Public Management may not be the whole of public administration, but, as with its antecedents, it defines the cutting edge of the profession and the field. Of greater significance, the New Public Management has many of the elements of, and indeed may be, public administration's present paradigm. and their Lietzke.

Thomas Kuhn's invaluable reflections on the structure of scientific revolutions enlightened us with the insight that intellectual fields have their own, quite unscientific, orthodoxies and heresies that are inherent to the worldviews, or paradigms, of disciplines. As a consequence, new ideas, or rediscovered oldideas, may be ignored, "crowded out," resisted, or denied by the field's mainstream as in the correct or even threatening established order (Kuhn 1962)

I think that Kuhn's argument is valid, and that it applies to contemporary public administration. As a paradigm, the New Public Management is not "responsible" for the governmental lapses that I shall review later; it did not cause them. But the New Public Management unwittingly facilitated these failures by focusing on factors that had only an indirect relevance in their prevention, and by largely ignoring those concerns that would have had a directly applicable impact on their prevention.

OUR NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The New Public Management may be reduced to the following features.

- *Performance and Productivity.* Citizens and public managers alike expect their systems of governance to deliver – that is, to provide more, and more responsive and

effective, services at lower cost to more people (Lynn, 1998; Osborne and Hutchinson 2004). The “institutional reforms associated with the New Public Management are unprecedented in the formal separation between policy making and service delivery” (Kaboolian 1998, 190).

● *Independence and Accountability.* Public administrators long for greater freedom to better their citizens’ lot, as the emergence of the term, *liberation management*, attests (Light 1997; Peters 1992). But the price of that independence is the assurance of public administrators’ accountability to the law, professional and community values, and the public interest. (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Frederickson 1997; Vigoda 2002).

● *Competition and Collaboration.* The New Public Management has an enduring interest in determining how intersectoral and intergovernmental competition and collaboration can enhance public performance (Henry 2002, 2007; Kettl, 1997, 2005; Peters 1996), and how public administrators and citizens can collaborate in more participative and productive ways (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Frederickson 1997; Vigoda 2002).

● *Changed Public Agencies.* Agencies will be evaluated increasingly in terms their resemblance to robust, effective organizations, regardless of sector (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2005). The characteristics of these high-performing organizations include agility, adaptability, alertness in anticipating and solving problems, and the aggressive use of information (Light 2005).

● *Internationalism.* The New Public Management is not a universal movement, but it is an international one, with especially strong showings in Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, United States, and most, if not all, of the Scandinavian nations (Kettl 2005); Lynn 1998; Pollitt and Boukaert 2000).

These features are wholly good. We like the New Public Management precisely because it connotes being innovative rather than routine, entrepreneurial rather than bureaucratic, and hard-nosed rather than soft-schnozzed.

WHAT IS MISSING IN THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT?

What is missing here? Nothing, or at least nothing important, you say? Permit me to differ. For all the good ideas forwarded by the New Public Management, some vital values of public administration seem to have been lost in its wake.

What the New Public Management is missing is this: honesty and competency.

Far be it from me to suggest that the New Public Management advocates dishonesty or incompetency. It patently does not, and the proponents of the New Public Management likely would take umbrage with the idea that they cavalierly discard governmental incorruptibility and capability. After all, governmental honesty, the New Public Managers would argue, is covered (at least implicitly) by the movement’s

emphasis on professionalism, and, as I noted, a few do mention in passing that legal accountability should not be forgotten. Similarly, professional competence is part and parcel (again, no need to actually express this self-evident truism) of the sophisticated techniques advocated by the New Public Managers as their main means of improving governments' performance.

And there's the rub. The New Public Management fails to address, except by the most indirect hints that derive from some of its underlying but unspoken assumptions, the ominous implications of corrupted or incompetent public administrators. This is not a "failure" of the New Public Management. But it is an insensitivity, an oversight, a lack of focus when it comes to the big issues of honest and able government.

The New Public Management is predicated on the pleasant premise that we live in a largely honest, safe, secure, and satisfied society. It assumes, with conspicuous benignancy, that uncorrupted government is the overwhelming norm, and that the average government is professionally capable, or, if not as capable as it should be, at least improvable to the point of capability.

Regrettably, this paradigm does not always hold up. In the twenty-first century, governmental honesty and competency sometimes slide on slippery slopes.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND HONEST GOVERNMENT

Consider corruption, which I define in traditional and straightforward terms: the plundering of the public purse for purposes of personal profit.

Although the United States has freed itself from the shackles of pandemic political corruption that characterized its governments in the late nineteenth century, corruption nonetheless persists, and may be growing. Federal prosecutions launched against public officials and others engaged in defrauding the federal government have almost quadrupled since 1980, and now near 500 indictments per year (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2006, Table 327). In 2000, the United States ranked fourteenth out of 90 countries on the respected Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 7.8 on a 10-point scale. In the most recent Index (2006), the United States received its lowest ranking ever (twentieth out of 163 nations), and its lowest score ever (7.3) (Transparency International 2007).

Corruption in America is not penny ante poker. The Justice Department's Operation Ill Wind exposed "America's biggest defense scandal" involving billions of dollars that were fraudulently spent in the 1980s by corrupt Pentagon administrators and corrupt private contractors, resulting in convictions of more than 90 companies and executives and more than a quarter billion dollars in fines (Pasztor 1995, 38). "Approximately \$8.8 billion" of the Development Fund for Iraq could not be accounted for due to "less than adequate controls" and "severe inefficiencies and poor management" by the Coalition Provisional Authority (U.S. Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction 2005, i-ii). After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast, "improper and potentially fraudulent payments" disbursed by the Federal Emergency

Management Agency in just six months following the hurricanes' landfall was about \$1 billion, or a fraud rate of 16 percent of FEMA's expenditures for victim assistance, plus an additional \$290 million in "overpayments" (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2007, Highlights).

As grave as these domestic scandals are, corruption is also important for a less provincial reason. Seventy countries are plagued by "rampant" corruption (Transparency International 2005, 1), and their citizens deeply detest it. Global polls find that political corruption ranks third in people's minds, after crime and AIDS, as a "very big" problem in their countries (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2002). Some examples may illustrate why: The Cameroonian cops who stopped a traveler 47 times during a 300-mile journey to demand bribes (Guest 2004). Or, in India, farmers who must pay *baksheesh* to their local governments' accountants to gain a clear title to their farms, or the rickshaw drivers who routinely sacrifice a sixth of their meager earnings to extortionist police (Friedman 2004).

Honesty and Democracy. One reason why citizens in most nations think that corruption is such a big problem may be that they viscerally comprehend that corruption stymies democracy, and the planet's people long have been united in their view that democracy is crucial to a good life. A massive and ongoing study, begun in the late 1970s, of citizens in 72 countries on six continents finds that "the basic ideas of democracy are virtually universally accepted around the world," regardless of culture, and that these ideas are "viewed as the only game in town," even by the residents of autarchies (Morin 2002).

The stirring, pro-democracy revolutions that began in 1974 with the Portuguese people's ouster of their fascist government, and which continue today, dramatically demonstrate the global yearning for democracy. They equally demonstrate (and the media commonly overlook this), however, a passion for honest government. The velvet, cedar, orange, rose, tulip and other "democracy revolutions," named or unnamed, consistently have sounded a leitmotif of anticorruption that matches in intensity the demand for democracy. We have heard this omnipresent cry to crush corruption from Kiev to Kyrgyzstan, from Beirut to Budapest.

And with reason. For one, just as corruption inhibits democracy, healthy democracy--defined as large numbers of citizens voting repeatedly in open, competitive elections-- inhibits corruption. This correlation holds true on a global scale (Bohara, Mitchell, and Mittendorff 2004). There is, in brief, a pleasing link between dynamic democracy and governmental honesty.

The Cost of Corruption. For another, corruption costs. Global corruption costs an estimated \$2.3 *trillion* per year (Ashcroft 2004), or approximately the same amount as the annual budget of the government of the United States. Corrupt public officials who skim tax payments may cost their governments as much as 50 percent of their tax revenue. Political corruption appears to inflate the prices for goods by as much as 15 to 20 percent,

and bribing corrupt officials to deliver public services costs citizens an additional 3 to 10 percent of the service's cost (Stapenhurst and Kpundeh 1999).

But wait. There's more. Corruption and poverty stroll hand-in-hand. The World Bank reports that countries seen as corrupt have lower levels of foreign investment, whereas nations that reduce corruption experience lower child mortality rates, higher per capita income, and greater literacy, among other benefits. Not one of the 19 impoverished nations that have been granted debt service relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative is rated as anything better than having "serious to severe" governmental corruption (Transparency International 2005).

Playing Catch-Up. In contrast to the globe's people, and despite corruption's colossal cost, much of the earth's officialdom has been slow, even recalcitrant, in recognizing the overweening importance of honest government in bettering people's lives. The World Bank asserts, accurately, that corruption has been "treated as a taboo subject" by the international development community for decades (Stapenhurst and Kpundeh 1999, vi).

Fortunately, this ostrich-like view is changing. Thirty-five countries, including the United States, have agreed to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Anti-bribery Convention, activated in 1999. Thirty-nine nations and 140 signatories, including the United States, have signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption of 2003. The World Bank has recognized that "corruption is one of the most serious obstacles to development," and has made fighting corruption "a central institutional priority" (Anderson, Hellman, and Jones 2000, xiv). The United Nations Development Program, the world's largest aid agency, has made "good government" its "top priority in poverty fighting" on the grounds that "without good government, reliance on trickle-down economic development and a host of other strategies will not work" (Crosette 2000).

Public administration – American-style public administration -- is viewed by reformers in many of these nations as a crucial tool in the detection and curtailment of corruption. The People's Republic of China, for instance, is investing in the field of public administration to an extent that rivals its unprecedented investment in economics 30 years ago, and China is doing so precisely because its central government believes that public administration is pivotal in reducing corruption.

Not Even Playing Catch-Up. In their new recognition of corruption's destructiveness, governments and the international development community are belatedly playing catch-up with the people. The New Public Managers, however, are not playing catch-up with even these laggardly establishments. Instead, they continue to downplay corruption by assuming that governments are inherently honest. This is a paradigmatic error. Public administration will not retain its global stature if honest government no longer is on the forefront of the field.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMPETENT GOVERNMENT

My second concern is that the New Public Management has placed not only corrupted government on the back burner, but competent government, too. To some degree, an increasingly politicized, incompetent public sector may be a reflection of the American political culture, a strong strain of which disagrees with the proposition that capable public administration is basic to human betterment.

Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the House, places this perspective in context: Conservatives "want the government to go away. That is what holds together the conservative movement" (Cassidy 2005, 46). As another powerful ideologue put it, "I don't want to abolish government. I want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub" (Grover Norquist, quoted in Friedman 2005).

The Cost of Incompetence. Consider some consequences of drowned government.

In staffing the Coalition Provisional Authority that governed Iraq for a year following the invasion of that country in 2003, seasoned administrative competence was discarded in favor of slavish ideological loyalty. A small but telling indicator: More than half of the Authority's 1,500 staffers had gotten their very first passport just to travel to Iraq. The results were predictable. When the Authority returned sovereignty to Iraq in 2004, electricity generation in Baghdad was one-third less, and trained Iraqi soldiers were two-thirds less, than its chief had promised; a mere 15,000 Iraqis were working on reconstruction projects, a trifle shy of the 250,000 promised; none of the \$18 billion Supplemental budget had been spent on construction, health, sanitation, or clean water; and the Iraqi insurgency was off and rolling (Chandrasekaran).

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina left more than more than 1,300 people dead, over 70,000 New Orleanians trapped in floodwaters for days (Select Bipartisan Committee 2006), and more than 800,000 households displaced a full six months after those waters had receded (Katz, Fellowes, and Mabanta 2006). An estimated 15 percent of New Orleans' police failed to report for duty; Louisiana's governor refused to declare martial law, or even a state of emergency (Select Bipartisan Committee 2006), and the president, in an out-of-it ode that will long live in the discourse of disconnectedness, praised his singularly inept top emergency manager with, "You're doin' a heckuva job, Brownie." The president of Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, had a somewhat different assessment: "The bureaucracy has murdered people in the greater New Orleans area" (Schneider 2005, 515).

Some Benefits of Competence. The facts belie the ideology of good-government-as-gone-government. Effective governments do not necessarily have to be big, but they do have to be strong, supple, and able. It is these governments that come considerably closer toward fulfilling their fundamental duties than do feeble, sclerotic, and bumfuzzled governments (Fukuyama 2004).

In contrast to incompetent government, competent government unites society. When terrorists murdered some 3,000 people on September 11, 2001, government was the core institution that responded to the horror. Credit was given to government, and properly so, for courageous rescues and the restoration of order. Surveys indicated that

Americans' trust in their government essentially doubled immediately following the attacks. Regrettably, people's confidence in their government has since regressed to pre-9/11 levels (Kincaid and Cole 2005).

Well-managed government also enhances the daily lives of people. To quote a study of the American states: "Our results clearly indicate that the management capacity of state governments also contributes directly to improving the overall quality of life for state citizens" (Cogburn and Schneider 2003, 1337).

Incompetent Government and the New Public Management. The New Public Management casts governmental excellence largely in terms of entrepreneurialism, collaboration, measurement, process, and technology. Able government is not much more than the attainment of greater programmatic efficiencies within a context of normalcy.

This is all to the good, of course, but the New Public Management's concept of governmental competence glosses over a fundamental public capacity. It is: protecting people from harm. Who cares about competencies in metrics, e-gov, and networking when civil society has collapsed and the bureaucracy, because it is incapable of assisting in any coherent and effective way, is "murdering" people?

REDISCOVERING GOOD GOVERNMENT

As I read my own justifications of why governmental honesty and competency are important, I am struck by how far a field public administration has wandered. In the not-so-distant past, the criticality of both topics was a given. Justifying them bordered on the silly. Not so today.

Why are we not more concerned about reconciling fiscal accountability with administrative effectiveness during times of crisis, such as domestic disasters and foreign occupations? Why are we not more concerned with the possible correlation, suggested by anecdotal evidence, between corruption and privatization? Why are we not more concerned with policymakers' distortions of data that so often underlie corrupt and incompetent government?

So there is my point: The New Public Management, and perhaps public administration in general, is not concentrating on the basics.

As late as the early twentieth century, the basics *were* public administration, and those basics were wrapped up in two words: Good Government. It is time to resurrect this dusty, musty, fusty phrase, and, with it, the values of open and able public administration.

As a historic rallying cry, "Good Government" is unequalled, and its roots are surprisingly global, cultural, and deep. Some 1,400 years ago, Emperor T'ai-tung left his lasting legacy to China, known to this day as "The Era of Good Government." Nearly 700 years ago, the great Italian artist, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, plastered his

magnificent murals, “Frescoes of the Good and Bad Government,” on the walls of Siena’s city hall.

In the United States, the phrase emerged in the nineteenth century as the cornerstone of sweeping governmental reform. Perhaps more than any other organization, the National Civil Service League (originally the National Civil Service Reform League, founded in 1877) is associated with the Good-Government reform movement (indeed, *Good Government* was the title of its journal), and during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the League was on the forefront of establishing civil services designed to replace corrupt party hacks with law-abiding and professional public administrators.

By the mid-twentieth century, the National Civil Service League was in a state of slow decay, and it quietly expired in the 1980s. Ironically, it had forsaken its own Good-Government traditions with the issuance in 1970 of its sixth and final Model Public Personnel Administration Law, which, whatever its influential merits (and they were many), nonetheless represented a distancing from its founding values of Good Government in favor of those values that we now associate with the New Public Management. The League, in its ending days, was trying to be relevant. And it was. But, as with the public administration community in general, the League abandoned the concept of Good Government in the process.

Today, Good Government is not merely dead, but discredited. It is a victim of both its own success in largely achieving its goals in the United States (a success that now seems to be slipping), and of its own failures, notably the stifling rigidities that remain its (diminishing) legacy in many American governments. “Good Government” is seen, in historical retrospective, as the underlying, if unwitting, cause of creaky, cranky, crusty, cantankerous, wrapped-in-red-tape, job-for-life government.

Granted, the Good-Government reformers brought us some governments that were not always the best governments, but their core values remain no less vital to the public interest. Good Government had its weaknesses, but today the field of public administration is more than well versed in them, and mitigating its flaws of unimaginativeness and inflexibility should be an easier issue to resolve than in the past. Governments in the United States, and in much of the world, are now facing new challenges and changes that demand creativity and suppleness, and the New Public Management is properly their escutcheon. But uncorrupted and professionally able government is needed more than ever. And Good Government, more than any other expression of the mission of public administration, places those values of honesty and competency squarely at the top of its priorities.

It is time to rediscover Good Government. So let’s hear it for dusty, musty, and fusty.

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