



GOVERNMENT PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

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Government Program Management

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Government Program Management

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Preface

If you are a program or project team manager or team member, or an appointed or career administrator/executive at any level of government in the United States—or in any western government—this book is about you. If you work on contracts with government programs or if you are in a nonprofit organization, this book is about you too. Working in the public sector as you do, you face unique challenges and opportunities to make a difference. While the job is getting harder, the public service is an exciting profession with a promising future and this is an optimistic book. We see progress and movement in old bureaucracies and old programs around the world, and we see major new and innovative experiments in government structure, process, and program management tools and techniques to address modern public policy issues.

Be patient with how this book is designed and written. We address both practical reality and theory here so that you can see *what is happening in this field globally and why it is happening*. The ultimate purpose of the book is to help decision-makers understand developments in public-sector programs globally so they can do the right things to improve them. Reform and change are not ends in themselves; they must have purpose and meaning so that change improves the “whole system.” Changing the “whole system” in this book means that we seek reforms that align local, regional, state, federal, and global goals and programs, tied together by a strong regional government structure. If that is too much to ask of our democracy, then managing government programs is going to get harder and harder.

Things will not get easier for you as more and more governments reform their agency and program frameworks, focus more on both outcomes and costs, and make their plans and programs visible to the public through new transparency and public information systems. Public-sector program planning and delivery will be tested as never before by a vigilant media, by a questioning public, and by elected officials increasingly challenged to deliver services and balance budgets at the same time. These factors are generating a growing public demand in the United States, and in fact in all the western democracies, to make government more professional, more efficient and effective, more ethical, and more transparent.

The nature of the *calling* to the public service in the 2000s has fundamentally changed from the large movement of people into government in the 1960s and

1970s. Once focused on service and sacrifice, now government seeks those who can produce more efficient and effective program outcomes, better and more integrated technology, and more public visibility and transparency. The call is for financial stewardship, accountability, and governmental restraint. The era of expansive government has changed to the era of accountability and control.

In our current national obsession with ineffective and wasteful government and “greed” in our financial industries, not enough good literature is being written about the successes of public-sector management and regulatory reform. The traditional American focus on inept “politics and politicians” tends to obscure the contributions and challenges of public agencies and civil servants who daily make a difference in people’s lives through public programs. Government can be made more effective in carrying out its program goals and objectives for the good of our citizens, and government can effectively nurture and guide the market system to preserve the competitive economy. But government must change with the times, aligning itself so that its programs work in concert at all levels and are transparent to the American public.

The book addresses the question of how government reforms, such as the New Public Management (i.e., the move to manage government more as a business), are impacting the performance of government agencies and programs in the United States and the rest of the industrialized world. We look globally at how broad program management as a field has grown and changed, as evidenced in the latest program standards from the Project Management Institute. We see how government executives and leaders are performing in their roles and how they are working to change the cultures of their agencies. And we see how the fast-moving digitization of the world is changing the potential for different channels and systems for delivery and transparency of government services and—and for better interactivity between the public sector and business.

While the recent impetus for *change* in the federal government is clouded by ambitious goals and increasing calls for performance reporting of *outcomes*, there are glimmers of promise that the dynamic forces of global change will force some resolution in national government structures and processes. In sum, something will have to “give” in the way governments programs function in an era of diminishing resources, oversized deficits, and blurred boundaries between government and business. That “give” will start with Presidential attention to the workings of federal, state, and local governments and a national movement toward accountability for outcomes and fiscal control.

We address reform in this book from the viewpoint of the program manager and agency executive, and see more autonomy and discretion in managing public-sector programs in the future. We believe that government program management will provide exciting new opportunities, but program managers will have to come to government equipped both technically and personally for new challenges created by an era of uncontrolled public-sector expansion and expectations.

Bruce T. Barkley

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Introduction

This is a book about how public-sector programs are changing globally and how program and project managers around the world are changing with them. The purpose of this introduction is to set the stage for looking broadly at the challenges involved in delivering government programs in today's complex world.

In response to the global demand for more accountable, visible, and responsive government, western world political and career leaders and legislatures are changing, reforming, and modernizing their governmental programs, structures, and processes. As governments face more complex problems in delivering programs through complex networks of intergovernmental jurisdictions and integrated systems across national borders, public program managers are increasingly finding that their old ways of doing the public's business simply do not work in today's world.

This dynamic process of regulatory and program reform offers great opportunities to public-sector executives and program managers—if they choose to take advantage of them. These changes present opportunities to deliver “smarter” programs more effectively while reducing costs, enhancing their own professional development and “world view,” learning and applying new technologies, and increasing public acceptance and support of their programs. Program managers who choose the “old” ways of thinking may be lost in the shuffle.

These western countries, including the United States, are moving to restore public trust and public involvement in public programs and policy making. Notably, European governments lead the way in many of these reforms, as well as Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand, all moving in the direction of more “open” governments and programs, smarter government using modern, interactive technologies, enhancing agency and program performance, tougher accountability and financial and cost control standards, more use of market-type mechanisms, and improving the leadership, work settings, and motivation of the public workforce. While the United States is part of this global movement, it is not its leader. The United States is not the leader because it is stymied in party-driven, polarizing debates; anti-government rhetoric; and public indifference to what the government actually does. The “opportunity cost” of this costly and ineffective dialogue, mostly carried out in the media, is lost time in making government and its programs more responsive at every level and reducing the cost of government. But perhaps even more importantly, the United States is missing an opportunity to take the global lead in furthering governmental reform and the promotion of good government practice, demonstrating to the

rest of the world a truly effective balance between *enlightened* regulation and a free market system, and the shoring up of weak governments through the world to help them deal with their constituent needs, offset economic and social inequities of the past, anticipate and mitigate natural disasters, and fill their basic societal needs for public infrastructure and stability.

The United States is at a key juncture in its development as a nation and world leader. The key to its successful recovery and advancement lies not simply in its capacity to wage war against terrorism and to recover its economy, but also in its capacity to promote what I would call *global governmental competence*. Competent government is smart, effective government and competent public-sector program management is action-oriented, collaborative, transparent, and outcome-based program management. Contrary to our prevailing, and mostly negative notions about government, it is our government(s)—at all levels—and their *combined workforce competence and performance* that hold the key to our success in nurturing our own free enterprise system, serving society with necessary public goods and services, and eliminating the public deficit over time.

Despite our youth as a nation, our governmental structures are old and worn out; they need real reform, *beginning with the people who run them and the processes they use*. It is the public-sector workforce and its leadership and competence that are in question, and without focused attention to building a new generation of public program managers and administrators for future public service in a modernized government structure, the future looks bleak. We continue to neglect our public workforce and continue to load it with new programs and embed new information and technology systems in old, bureaucratic, organizational, and programmatic structures rather than redesigning new structures for a modern world and for a “whole of government” approach.

Winston Churchill once expressed his view of America’s unique approach to its problems—to paraphrase him: “You can trust the United States to come up with the right solution to its problems after first exhausting every possible alternative.” We have now exhausted all of our alternatives. We are like a lost driver; it’s time to look at the map. The United States has explored every possible solution to its governmental program management problems, and none has worked. Now we must turn our attention to the map, the map of *basic good management*.

Don Kettl, in *The Next Government of the United States: Why Our Institutions Fail Us and How to Fix Them*, captures perhaps better than anyone else the dilemma of today’s governmental and agency program manager. He finds that having explored everything from efficiency and effectiveness, to privatization, to downsizing, to cost effectiveness, to performance management focused on outcomes and benefits, we find that the *best way to run government is to actually manage it*. Rather than concluding that it “isn’t rocket science,” Kettl concludes that *it is rocket science as NASA and IBM practice it*: thinking strategically, defining problems, making evidence-driven decisions, building

effective, multiorganizational teams, involving the community, creating a system that rewards success, and driving it with strong leadership.

Kettl concludes that federal administrations since Roosevelt have been identifying parts of the problem and addressing those parts with partial solutions, even though Peter Drucker, the great father of professional management, gave them the answer 50 years ago. It's called management, and there is no agency or point person in government accountable for managing the federal government, except for a busy and overloaded president. The U.S. president needs a new management arm to carry out and coordinate its programs, perhaps through a new Office of Federal Management or some other "lean" organizational structure. Many other western, industrialized countries have discovered good management practice, applied to public goods and services, but the United States struggles because our leaders—in both the public and the private sectors—do not recognize public management as a reputable profession and have not embedded good management into the ethic and fabric of public policy and government programs. While each administration in the past 50 years has labeled its proposals for change as "reforms," in the classic sense of the term *reform*, there has not been a substantial change in public management theory or practice since the creation of the city management profession in the progressive movement of the late nineteenth century. We have neglected our government for a century—especially our federal government—because we do not yet value it.

This is a positive book about government program management, with an optimistic flavor; it is not a book complaining about government. But make no mistake about it; public-sector programs are in trouble and must reform themselves, or there will be major national and socioeconomic consequences such as those from the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the financial crisis beginning in 2008. This is why after analyzing program management and performance issues for this book, we make recommendations for action aimed at specific decision makers—beginning with the president of the United States. It is time for the president and other western leaders to take interest in running their governments, empowering agency and program managers to trim expenses and focus on outcomes, rebuilding their deteriorating public workforces toward a more professional model, working with all governmental levels to produce true cooperation, controlling spending and waste, and delivering on the government's promises for program outcomes and benefits. Some western democracies are beginning that difficult process, but the United States is lagging behind.

It is a difficult time for public-sector program managers, and the job is changing. We need senior career executives in the public sector who can lead, collaborate, negotiate, and deliver on promised outcomes, efficiently and effectively. We need managers who know how to use proven program and project management tools and techniques. And we need program managers who can build coalitions in complex networks of jurisdictions and authorities, create institutions, work with industry on difficult regulatory issues, and create conditions for program success. Program management is no longer a simple process of identifying requirements, writing a scope of work, creating tasks, scheduling them, allocating costs,