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Book Review

Governing in the Round: Strategies for Holistic Government

Perri 6, Diana Leat, Kimberly Seltzer, and Gerry Stoker; London, Demos, 1999, 96 pages

Obviously, we need international publications in public management for communication about what happens in different nations. Accordingly, a good reason to review *Governing in the Round* for this journal is to inform readers of this valuable source of information about efforts in the UK to coordinate government programs. The aim of integrating fragmented activities by people who should be working at common purposes is, in a sense, an old one in many nations. In the 1970's, the US Congress passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) to provide for local coordination of a diffuse array of employment and training programs in government. Around the same time, the Equal Employment Opportunity Coordinating Council was formed to coordinate the divergent EEO activities in the federal government. Integrated service delivery, one stop shopping, and related efforts have been objectives in public programs for years. "Partnering" has become part of the mantra of government in recent years (e.g., Holzer & Callahan, 1998).

In *Governing in the Round*, however, the authors describe a growing perception in the UK and elsewhere that the reinventing government movement has actually aggravated problems of fragmentation, through its emphasis on enhancing the performance of individual agencies and programs in delivering services. They indicate a higher-level and more widespread concern with "joined up" and "holistic" government, voiced by Tony Blair and other leaders of "New Labor." They argue that this trend amounts to more than a simple repetition of some of the efforts in the 1970s, such as those noted above. As do others, they regard it as a significant, central theme in reform for now and the next decade at least, for nations around the world (Osborne, 2000). Regardless of whether one accepts this particular argument, virtually all participants in public administration should acknowledge the importance of coordinating and integrating programs and services. This makes the authors' depiction of the current developments in the UK of particular value for readers who have not been able to follow them as closely as these authors have, due to their research and advantageous perspective.

Of still greater interest are the authors' efforts, based on their research, to assess this movement and draw lessons from it, provide a framework and strategies for "holistic" government, and ultimately to defend the movement against some growing criticisms and expressions of discouragement. Moreover, many of their conclusions reflect on more general

and recurrent issues in public management reforms, such as the relations between central and local governments and the troubled history of top-down fiats from the former to the latter, the problem that political leaders need to claim successes rapidly, and many others.

In a concise summary that leads off the book, the authors provide a list of key lessons and principal recommendations. The key lessons include the need to recognize that holistic government is a distinctive and radical agenda, not a simplistic or costless panacea, and that it requires innovation and courage from politicians and public managers. It requires mainstream management skills, such that managers need not consider it beyond their capability. It requires appropriate forms of integration at different levels for different goals. Joined-up knowledge and accountability are more important than joined-up budgets. Joined-up consumer interfaces are important, but policy-level integration is also essential. Politicians and managers will need to develop new ground rules regarding privacy, democracy, and accountability. Nevertheless, they say, there are many good examples and reasons for optimism.

As for principal recommendations, the authors again emphasize the need for more effective policy-level integration. Also, central government must correct early mistakes by, among others steps, avoiding “fragmented holism” and recognizing that holistic working cannot be unilaterally imposed from the top down. Integrated budgets must be used sparingly, the authors say, and accountability agencies must learn new kinds of evaluation to recognize joined-up solutions. Politicians must avoid imposing goals and performance measures too early in the process of developing integrated practices. The roles of central authorities in learning and information gathering need to be augmented by regional *Lessons Learned Units*. Central government must develop standards for holistic information systems, while also protecting personal privacy. Pay, training, and career paths must be reformed to encourage movement among positions and agencies and to define careers around outcomes for clientele, rather than professional or agency activity. Political leaders must tackle policy dilemmas, such as privacy issues, building public understanding and support for holistic working. They must also recognize the “bottom up” nature of successful integration of services, and the need to develop incentives and capabilities for local governments to play a key role.

If these lessons and recommendations often sound rather generic, as if they could apply to many reform initiatives, and if they make some readers feel a need for more examples and illustrations of actual efforts at holistic government, the subsequent chapters do little to change these impressions. The introductory chapter comes as close as we come to description of “holistic” efforts, in a brief list of some examples. The list names, without elaboration or description, some initiatives in “holistic” auditing, budgeting, information systems, policy coordination, and devolved structures, as well as central government reorganizations to support holistic working. The authors show impressive familiarity with such developments in various nations, but do not impart details of that knowledge to the reader. The authors also present a list of benefits that they have observed, including savings in staff through colocation, reduced dumping of clients, flatter management structures, improved communication, policy-making, trust, and several others. They report that consumers have benefited from quicker and more comprehensive handling of cases, improved responses to complaints, and higher quality of services.

The authors say that their conclusions are based on research they have done, and the book occasionally refers to interviews and examples. The authors announce that they do not intend to describe their research, evidence, and methods in this particular report, but that they will do so in a later book. Ultimately, then, we receive no validation or empirical substantiation of these lists of conclusions, findings, and recommendations, and must look forward to the later book for more evidence and information.

The second chapter provides further description of New Labor's support for joined-up government, as well as further elaboration of some of the lessons mentioned above. For example, the authors cite the problems of "initiativitis," of the impatience of political figures who need fast results to which they can point, the problem of moving too fast in insisting on measurement of goal accomplishment, of "hogging" lessons at central government levels, and of various other complications in efforts thus far. They then elaborate on lessons and suggestions, calling for patience, for allowing managers time and opportunity to learn, for sharing lessons more effectively, and for developing new forms of accountability.

In the third chapter the authors present conceptual frameworks to guide thinking about integrated government. One of these distinguishes between consumers, citizens, and clients, on the basis of these groups' different roles and demands. Another framework differentiates among policy goals, client goals, organizational goals, and agency goals, and the associated inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Still another framework arrays different mechanisms for support of these different types of goals.

A fourth chapter addresses the "strategy tool-kit." It provides some of the most interesting and useful analysis in the book, and since no good deed goes unpunished, will get undeserved short shrift here (in large part because of problems in adequately summarizing it). The authors array the different relationships that can exist among entities in integration (dialogue, joint project, etc.). They discuss obstacles to holistic working (such as inadequate authority or capacity), as well as factors conducive to its success. They then enumerate and discuss power tools and tactics for use in making holistic government work.

In a final chapter, the authors, reporting that they are encountering rumblings of disenchantment with progress to date, address some of the criticisms of holistic government efforts. In the larger and longer-term context of reforms, their need to do this takes on a rather ominous aspect, raising as it does the specter of one more much-ballyhooed revolution, touted as a groundswell destined to reshape government (or, indeed, life itself) as we know it, and to dominate discourse and action for years to come (or at least until next year, or until someone writes another book that catches on, whichever comes first). Nevertheless, the authors do directly confront the question of whether this is just another fad. Many of the points they advance are well-aimed at the more general reasons why observers so often find that innovations and reforms lack staying power (e.g., Light, 1998; Savoie, 1994). Somehow we do need to find ways to provide incentives for political and administrative leaders to display more patience and perseverance, to support more experimentation, learning, and sharing by the people actually doing the work, to develop more holistic policies, and in general to provide more sophisticated and courageous public leadership.

While these chapters convey valuable observations and a lot of wisdom, they will be of most value to persons already familiar with efforts to achieve holistic and joined-up government. Readers less experienced with these matters will not find clear descriptions of

examples, cases, and experiences to date. You will not see in much detail what has been tried and how it has been done, with evidence or examples explaining success or failure. Rather, one encounters names of projects and of types of arrangements (for example, “joined-up budgets”). In addition, many readers will not readily recognize some of the administrative entities to which the authors frequently refer. (For example, they often mention the “Social Exclusion Unit,” which must have the grave task of ameliorating social exclusion, but whose title conjures up a Monty Python sketch in which sanctimonious officials banish from society those persons deserving of it, starting with people who talk loudly on cell phones in public places). Nor do the authors provide systematic reports of evidence and methodology that substantiate their conclusions. (As noted above, they apparently intend that for a later volume). Still, the slim volume is a fast and informative read, of interest for those concerned with holistic government as well as for those more generally interested in governmental and administrative reform, who want information on how the “governing in the round” efforts reflect on this broader topic.

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