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Book Reviews

Building Global Public Management Governance Capacity: “The Road Not Taken”


The World We Could Win, edited by Josephine Fraser-Moleketi, presents the findings of an international task force on administering global governance sponsored by the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS). The IIAS, founded in 1930 and headquartered in Belgium, is an association of 90 member states concerned with the study and practice of public management globally. This book is divided into two parts. The first part comprises six essays on different facets of global governance: multilevel governance (Andrew Massey), government and corporate relations and the World Trade Organization (Richard Higgott), access to justice (Jacque Ziller), global e-governance (Pan Suk Kim and Whasun Jho), leadership (Craig Baker and Emily Christensen), and the human factor (Dimitri Argyriades). The second part presents regional perspectives on administering global governance in Africa (Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and John-Mary Kauzya), Japan (Akira Nakamura), and Europe (Werner Jann), plus a postscript (Anthony Makrydemes) on the moral assumptions underlying global governance models. It concludes with several concrete recommendations for moving toward global governance: a charter, a merit-based senior executive service and civil service, professional training and development for this cadre of global governance administrators, a global fund for enhancing governance capacity, annual reporting on key global governance issues, and a specific focus on interaction, conflict, and ambiguities among national, subnational, and other levels of global governance.

In International Development Governance, editors Ahmed Shafiqul Huque and Habib Zafarullah, make a comprehensive effort to link development and governance in the context of public policy and administration. The book has three objectives: to initiate discussion on the concept of development and governance (part I) by examining a range of issues and problems that developing countries face in establishing sustainable governance (part II), to look at tools that can contribute to this process (part III), and to examine their application to specific sectors (e.g., industry, agriculture, water, technology, health, and rural development). The 48 contributing authors are primarily professors in British Commonwealth and European universities. Huque and Zafarullah are political science professors with extensive experience in public policy, public administration, development, and governance, primarily in Southeast Asia, and with international development organizations.

Finally, Global Public Management, edited by Kathe Callahan, Dorothy F. Olshfski, and Erwin Schwella, offers a collection of short cases (3–12 pages in length) that illustrate workplace problems and policy situations that managers might face anywhere in the world, followed by commentaries by public management scholars and practitioners. Each commentary focuses on identifying the problem and offering suggestions on how to handle the conflict.

These three books have some similarities. All are edited readers that focus on the development of governance capacity. Each frames the topic conceptually, discusses current issues and problems, and focuses on specific sectors or regions. But here the similarities end and significant differences become apparent: tone, scope, level of analysis, and intended audience.
Fraser-Moleketi’s book is a series of hortatory essays intended to establish the broad outlines of a global governance system for high-level policy makers and global scholars. It is editorially unified because it is the product of a work group sponsored by a single organization. Huque and Zafarullah’s work, on the other hand, is a much longer compendium of articles, less unified editorially, and written by a larger group of scholars who have worked individually and electronically with the editors but not face-to-face with them or one another. It is comprehensive, detailed, and intended not only for senior government officials but also for a larger audience of development program managers, consultants and scholars.

Callahan, Olshfski, and Schwella’s reader is meant to introduce public administration students—including those without international experience—to public management issues at the supervisory level. Thus, its focus is much more operational and its level of analysis much more specific to the workplace. Although it suggests solutions and offers commentaries on areas of supervisory practice, the book lacks an overall conceptual frame of research or theory that would put these cases in the context of global capacity building. And because it assumes a universal similarity of managerial problems, it discusses responses without defining contextual variables or using them to indicate the comparative strengths of alternative solutions.

Global Development Positioning Systems

Global positioning systems (GPS) were originally developed as one component of a missile targeting system that could pinpoint locations by triangulating radio waves from multiple satellites. They now have myriad applications, from plotting geographic information systems data for policy planning and evaluation to high-tech stocking stuffers for contemporary backcountry explorers and road warriors. They tell us where we are on the earth’s surface, and by integrating terrain maps with waypoints on an itinerary, they can tell us how to get where we want to go.

Those of us who are concerned with building global public management capacity can only hope for the invention of similar hand-held global development positioning system (GDPS) units that would make it easy to determine clear and precise answers to these same questions from our own perspectives. We might test the three books reviewed here as prototype GDPS units, then, by comparing the answers they give to the same set of questions: Where are we with respect to global governance and development? Where do we want to go? What is the best way to get there?

Both Fraser-Moleketi’s and Huque and Zafarullah’s books were developed by a consortium of European and Asian design engineers and marketed through a network of international development organizations. Though they are intended for different users and emphasize different features, their answers to these three important questions are consistent. They assume that globalization is real; that governance means both traditional state-based authority and the more complex interactions among public, private, and nongovernmental organizations that characterize contemporary development management; and that government capacity is essential to global development and poverty reduction. They answer the following the questions:

- Where are we? On the brink of an era in which global governance capacity will be developed through the application of traditional public administration design principles to nation-state interactions, aided by multinational corporations and nongovernmental organizations, in what has become a model for networked global governance.
- Where do we want to go? Toward collective global security characterized by poverty reduction, fair markets, environmental sustainability, and social justice.
- How do we get there? Through long-term cooperation among organizations from these three sectors toward sustainable global development, measured by such indicators as the UN Millennium Development Goals (UNPAN 2006).

Callahan, Olshfski, and Schwella’s volume, which was produced by a U.S.-led consortium, is less explicit about where we are and where we are going. Because this book’s tone and intended audience differ markedly from the panoramic and policy analytical approach of the other two, comparing them is somewhat analogous to comparing a GPS unit to a compass. The compass can tell us what direction to go, but not where we are or where we want to go. Callahan, Olshfski, and Schwella assume that a range of common managerial issues—supervision, decision making, conflict resolution, and so on—can be resolved through the uniform application of public management techniques across cultures. In some respects, this difference is idiosyncratic, a result of this book’s different objectives and audience. But an emphasis on outlining pragmatic managerial strategies rather than establishing the current situation and desired long-term objectives is also typical of much U.S. public administration literature (Stillman 2000). Yet even if this book functions more like a compass than a GDPS unit, it is possible to contextualize it within the general framework of assumptions that underlie U.S. public management literature:

- Where are we? In the middle of a continuing struggle among nation-states to preserve economic, political, and social stability in the face of globalization and insecurity, including such threats as terrorism, migrations, pandemics, and limited natural resources.
Where do we want to go? Toward a collective global security characterized by a reduction in terrorism, migration, and pandemics and an increase in exploitable resources and global carrying capacity.

How do we get there? Though traditional international relations augmented by market capitalism and international nongovernmental organizations, particularly with respect to controlling terrorism, international migration, and pandemics; within this context, by the application of generic international public management techniques to enhance government capacity, transparency, and accountability.

A hypothetical comparison of these two competing GDPs models may be clear and intellectually pleasing. Yet it is unfair because each is designed to operate best under a given set of assumptions, conditions, and constraints. Practical global development strategies are more likely to represent shades of grey than a bifurcated choice between black and white:

Where are we? Continuing the struggle to preserve economic, political, and social stability in the face of globalization and insecurity and in an era of U.S. superpower dominance, though that country faces persistent threats from Europe and emerging threats from China and India. We are also developing networking global governance capacity through the application of traditional public administration principles to public, corporate, and international nongovernmental development organizations.

Where do we want to go? Toward collective, sustainable global development and security measured by such indicators as poverty reduction, fair markets, environmental sustainability, and social justice. In the immediate future, progress toward these goals can best be measured by reductions in terrorism, migration, and pandemics; in the long run, it will require increased exploitable resources (such as energy, water, aquaculture and agriculture), increased global carrying capacity, and decreased pollution (including greenhouse gasses).

How do we get there? The only conceivable paths require long-term cooperation among nation-states, market capitalism, and international development organizations. Within this context—and despite the inevitability of problems related to their competing frames of reference and accountability (Klingner, Nalbandian, and Romzek 2002)—we can apply generic public management techniques to enhance government capacity, transparency, and accountability.

Yet a pragmatic middle ground between opposing worldviews is not always possible, and the search for it is not always the best use of our time. As globalization becomes more pervasive and intrusive, and as the economic gap between developed and developing nations widens, worldwide concern mounts over globalization’s “discontents.” The struggle to develop government capacity is perhaps the most obvious factor affecting perceptions of governance. In developed countries, governance usually means maintaining the government’s ability to coordinate policy, gather information, deliver services through multiple (often nongovernmental partners), and replace hierarchical bureaucracies with more flexible mechanisms for managing indirect government. In developing countries, it probably means establishing government’s ability to deliver vital public services (through core administrative functions such as budgeting, human resource management, and program evaluation) while simultaneously focusing on the more fundamental changes (e.g., citizen participation, decentralization, innovation and entrepreneurial leadership) that are necessary for effective political systems.

Arguably, the key question in global governance and development is how best to develop government capacity in the fragile countries and governments that mark the political, economic, and social “tipping points” between these two increasingly unavoidable alternative futures, both predicted 250 years ago. The Enlightenment vision of an increasingly rational and cooperative world, articulated by Locke and Rousseau, seems a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development or any of the UN Millennium Development Goals. But we do wish this vision gave more concrete policy and management options for addressing AIDS, poverty, corporate greed, weak governments, child soldiers, captive media, suicide bombers, and other troubling indicators that Hobbes and Orwell may have been right after all (Klingner 2004).

Knowledge Management, International Development, and “The Road Not Taken”

The underlying issue is not only a choice between (or reconciliation of) alternative models of international development. It is also the selection of practicable models of knowledge management and organizational learning that embody the underlying importance of technology transfer for both organizations and cultures—methods that can be applied to the heterogeneous, unstable, and shifting contexts of international development so as to improve organizational effectiveness or public policy outcomes (Klingner and Sabet 2005). Conceptually, it involves the relationships among information, knowledge, and wisdom. Operationally, it requires the creation and management of knowledge in learning organizations through a “knowledge spiral” whereby individuals’ insights and innovations help the organization adapt to changing and challenging environments. On a more global scale, it involves the successful transplantation of best practices from their initial contexts to other regions or countries to achieve economic, social, political, or environmental goals. Viewed in both its organizational and societal contexts, technology transfer
requires an understanding of the conditions and factors that allow the successful adaptation of endogenous technologies to exogenous situations and the systematic development of guidelines and methodologies for successful innovation diffusion and adoption.

The relationship between knowledge management and the development of global governance capacity may be described, in one sense, as the conflict between Kuhn’s (1996) normal science compromise approach to global development and more radical perspectives that require us to choose between them or investigate totally different options for framing reality. I recommend four books to those who wish to explore the knowledge management and organizational learning issues that frame international development: The Tipping Point (Gladwell 2002), Blink (Gladwell 2005), Freakonomics (Levitt and Dubner 2005), and The World Is Flat (Friedman 2006).

Gladwell’s initial thesis in The Tipping Point (2002) is that ideas, products, messages, and behaviors spread like viruses with the help of three pivotal types of persons: connectors (the sociable personalities who bring people together), mavens (who like to pass on knowledge), and salesmen (who are adept at persuading the unenlightened). Little changes can have big effects. When small numbers of people start behaving differently, that behavior can ripple outward until a critical mass or “tipping point” is reached, changing the world. Though his examples are engaging and his ideas thought provoking, his investigation into the underlying mechanisms affecting innovation diffusion and adoption is less explicit.

In Blink (2005), Gladwell extends this idea, investigating how people’s first impressions profoundly affect their attitudes and behaviors in many everyday activities. His conclusions, drawn from studying the way people make instant decisions in a wide range of fields from psychology to police work, are that (1) we can make better instant judgments by training our minds and senses to focus on the most relevant facts, and (2) less input—as long as it is the right input—is better than more.

Levitt and Dubner (2005) argue that the mysteries of human behavior become more understandable once the hidden incentives behind them are applied to everyday situations. There really is no grand theory of everything here, except perhaps the suggestion that self-styled experts have a vested interest in promoting conventional wisdom even when it is wrong. Underlying all of these research subjects is a belief that complex phenomena can be understood if we find the right perspective.

Finally, Friedman (2006) engages readers with the connectedness of the world that has resulted from global trends in trade, politics, and information and communications technology. This book continues his earlier writings by focusing on innovative uses of information and communications technology, not by major corporations or giant trade organizations such as the World Bank but also by individuals and small organizations—desktop freelancers and innovative startups all over the world, especially in Brazil, Russia, India, and China.

Thus, we are confronted by divergent views about building global governance capacity. Although conventional wisdom indicates that compromise and the reconciliation of opposites facilitate promising paths toward progress from within a normal science perspective, we may instead rely on others (e.g., Friedman, Gladwell, and Levitt) who favor more discontinuous models of perception and response. Those who make a living building global governance capacity understand that the prototypical Eurasian and U.S. GDP models differ fundamentally, and thus there are two different conversations taking place in the world right now—one when Americans are in the room and the other when they are absent—with respect to where we are, where we are going, and how we should get there. Books such as those by Fraser-Moleketi and Huque and Zafarullah may, in the long run, represent a paradigm shift that perceives global governance capacity building as more than the extension of U.S.-based management techniques to diverse situations. As Robert Frost wrote almost a century ago in “The Road Not Taken,”

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.  

Notes
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References