BOOK REVIEW ━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━

Unleashing Change: A Study of Organizational Renewal in Government. By Steven Kelman, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005 ISBN 0-8157-4899-x, paperback, 308 pages, $29.95.

Unleashing Change: A Study of Organizational Renewal in Government is an important book for both public procurement and organizational change. It chronicles both the research and practices of procurement reform by a Clinton appointee. This opportunity to analyze procurement reform both as an academic study and as a practitioner offers an uncommon combination of perspectives, insights, and opportunities. Because of this convergence of theory and praxis, the study offers layers of use to procurement professionals, scholars, and students.

Kelman takes care during the research process to maintain scholarly integrity and avoid some of the pitfalls associated with being so close to his source of information. To this end, he makes an effort to distance himself from the information he obtains. In addition, he adopted a quantitative approach to the research, while incorporating qualitative elements and remaining aware of how his leadership efforts could often influence the change process.

In addition, the unusual circumstances around this study tend to color the prose and choices made by the author, influencing the tone of the book. Specifically, he makes certain information gathering and analytical choices that have repercussions beyond discussions of whether or not the study could be considered social science (p.3). Kelman also takes great care in couching much of his argument into the mainstream

literature on organizational change, also possibly to compensate for his concern about being able to "dispassionately evaluate" these reforms.

Given these concerns, it is no surprise that *Unleashing Change* offers on the surface a "textbook" style discussion of organizational change. It reflects many of the themes common to most organizational development texts, including concepts such as stovepipes, positive reinforcement, and institutionalizing change. In addition, the instruments and methods, language, and discussion of results reflect a very orthodox approach to research on organizational change. The true value of the book, however, is below the surface, where Kelman offers some useful insights into both the literature on organizational change and procurement reform in the light of the reinvention movement of the 1990s.

Within this context, Kelman seeks to enhance our understanding of organizational change, and possibly move beyond the assumption that people by their nature are resistant to change. This is appealing, since it introduces some realism into contemporary discussions of organizational change. Kelman rightly points to the complexity around the issue of getting people to buy into change, and develops a useful conceptual framework as an alternative to a more orthodox view that people are by their nature resistant to change. The book provides an interesting contribution to the knowledge base on organizational change from this perspective.

As a mechanism to highlight this specific issue, the assumption of change resistance, the book adopts a methodical approach to the literature. Outside this shift in focus toward a view that resistance to change is not a given, the remaining theoretical discussions of organization development and change do not stray far from the orthodox conceptions in the field. For the most part, the book continues to reflect a classic understanding of organizational change, of bureaus, and their structures.

In addition, the book is influenced by Kelman's application of classical social science approaches to inquiry in Public Administration. For example, the author takes a great deal of care to mitigate if not eliminate biases in reporting throughout the text. He studied contracting employees at nineteen buying offices for the federal government using two surveys (Kelman, 2005 p. 33). One was self-reported, and the other was administered as part of a face-to-face interview. Such decisions led to the selection of a mainstream research design and analytical technique.

Kelman evaluated the data gathered using multiple regression, and evaluated the findings, uncovering some interesting explanations of how change could become institutionalized as well as what the challenges to instituting change were.

Kelman also has another agenda, to reestablish the place of quantitative analysis in the study of organizational change (p. 35). This secondary agenda item, reflecting Kelman's earlier concern about the role of social science research in organizational change distracts the reader somewhat from the primary goal of the book that is to understand the complexity of organizational change. The mode of presentation alternates between an engaging first person account of the change process and rather formal discussions of the analytical results. This choice works against the cohesiveness of the text.

The one weakness in the text, reflect his adoption of certain older conventions of quantitative research, undermining Kelman's second goal. To reinforce the need to do better social science in the mainstream study of organizational change, it would have been more powerful, more persuasive if he employed designs and methodologies that demonstrated a certain isomorphic elegance, and enhanced the unique qualities of the study. For example, since the survey questions tended to focus on perceptions and feelings, it would have been interesting to see some psychometric scaling techniques instead of the Likert-type scales used. In addition, there are analytical tools currently employed in marketing research and psychometrics that could have been useful for evaluating the conceptual framework offered in lieu of regression. Though the choice of regression and Likert-type approaches make the study more accessible to a broader audience, selecting different techniques would have better supported his second goal of developing rigorous quantitative approaches to change.

It is important to understand that the book is important despite these methodological limitations. The greatest contribution of the work comes from the author's conceptual shift away from the assumption that people are resistant to change in organizations. Specifically, the author incorporates writing on social movements and politics into his discussions of the process. In addition, he adopts a broader societal focus to contextualize assumptions about organizational change, rather than adopting certain orthodox assumptions, making a substantial contribution to the literature by integrating issues of political conflict,

group behavior, and linguistics (from the perspective of Simmel and other social theorists) into the study of organizational change.

Another strength of the text comes from the link to contemporary procurement processes and political issues. Rather than simply ending the book upon completion of the analysis (which coincided with the Clinton presidency), Kelman instead added a follow up discussion to his work. This helps to allude to the consequences that partisan politics can have on the change process. One of the more useful points emerges from a discussion of how goal oriented approaches to change in procurement can create blind spots (P.210), which can leave agencies open to questions of abuse and potentially fraud. This is particularly interesting since contemporary allegations of fraud and abuse tend to be driven by perception, by political interests, issues, language games, and other political objectives.

Like any good piece of research, there are a number of interesting questions that remain unanswered. For example, he argued that the "reinvention" movement was at least in part driven positive change, by political reform. This clearly reflects the literature of the "new public management" and its associated areas of focus. It is useful to develop process improvement strategies, manage change, and develop better techniques for the implementation and evaluation of public policies, but we must also remember this is one aspect of a multilayered process (Stivers, 2000). One of the big questions that remain for the profession is how to balance, reconcile, or even begin to understand these different aspects of the process.

For example, at the core of his argument, Kelman assumes this reform is real, and that political actors truly want to improve the processes of procurement. What if Fox (1996) is right, and the process of "reinvention" is really at its core more symbol than fact, more language game (Wittgenstein, 1953) than re-engineering, and more political posturing than commitment to change? Such concerns paint a different picture of the context of organizational change processes, but it does not in any way invalidate Kelman's work. In fact, in many ways, such a proposition makes the theoretical contribution of his work more valuable by linking it more explicitly to contemporary political processes. Furthermore, why is change inevitably portrayed as a good thing? We know change happens often regardless of whether or not it is intended with a variety of outcomes (Abel & Sementelli, 2003). We only

get positive change some of the time, and other times change can be destructive or do nothing at all.

Change, however is central to Public Administration theory and practice (Stillman, 1999). As a rule, it almost constantly reinvents itself both theoretically and practically to adept to political, social, economic, and other shifts. Kelman's book represents a positive movement in the literature, and opens doors to further research in the area of organizational change in Public Administration. In the near term, the research questions could be reconsidered in the light of different instruments and analytical techniques. In the longer term, it has the potential to move us away from the dated notion that people are fundamentally resistant to change, toward a more realistic approach that resistance is a function of a variety of factors, which might change over time given environments, interaction, and other reasons. In the end, Kelman's book invites us to reconsider the literature on organizational change, how it can inform procurement practices, and how they fit into our broader understanding of governmental processes.

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