

## Will Our Volatile Times Change Public Administration? Book Review

Zeger van der Wal, *The 21st Century Public Manager* (London: Palgrave, 2017) 392 pp. \$120.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9781137507433; \$47.99 (paper), ISBN: 9781137507426.

Many years have passed since Luther Gulick's (1937) articulation of POSDCORB (Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting) as the core tasks for public administrators, but even the most progressive contemporary texts on public management tend to be organized around a set of staple tasks that must be undertaken by managers. The durability of POSDCORB is evident in the curriculum of many graduate programs in public administration and the professional competencies outlined for students entering the field. A new book prepared by Zeger van der Wal offers a new acronym and a new set of tasks for the manager, prompting readers to give careful attention to trends sweeping this globalizing profession. In *The 21st Century Public Manager*, van der Wal argues public management competencies must be developed to respond to an external environment that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). Van der Wal describes this book as a training tool for managers around the globe because the VUCA forces reshaping public management are just as relevant to those in developing countries as they are to those in advanced industrialized democracies. So too, the author reminds us that public management education is now global, placing a new burden on instructors to prepare students to face future challenges, rather than adopt past reform models. The book succeeds in stimulating the reader's imagination as to how the future might be different than the past; however, placing VUCA at the center of public administration raises normative questions not fully engaged in van der Wal's presentation of public management training.

Sketching out the work of the twenty-first century public manager, van der Wal builds upon a solid foundation of public administration research,

acknowledging the field's history and reform trends. The second chapter of the book describes the progression from hierarchical management in bureaucracies to new public management (NPM) reforms, to the emergence of multi-sector governance and networks. Van der Wal suggests the progression of models in the public management literature does not necessarily reflect a linear trajectory of development in practice. Across the globe, under different constitutional regimes and levels of development, the public sector may still place more emphasis on responsiveness to hierarchies rather than an emphasis on decentralization, performance, and stakeholder engagement. This is similar to Fukuyama's (2013) observation that sufficient administrative capacity is a necessary pre-condition to move away from hierarchical controls and allow greater discretion. Instead, van der Wal directs our attention to "global megatrends" shaping the external environment for public management.

Chapter 3 outlines these global megatrends, which include the expansion of technology, demands for transparency, changing global demographics, economic interconnectedness, pressure to do more with less, the rise of Asia in a multi-polar world, urbanization, and resource stress. Van der Wal acknowledges, "A key question here is to what extent public managers are actually able and capable to affect—let alone drive—these dynamics" (62). From these megatrends, the book derives a list of seven managerial demands, presented in Chapter 4. This list includes, managing stakeholder multiplicity, authority turbulence, the new work (force), ethical complexities, short versus long time horizons, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Each subsequent chapter in the book is devoted to one of these demands.

Several of the management demands discussed in the book can be found in most public management textbooks. For example, stakeholder engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and ethics have become routine topics presented in an overview of the field. Other chapters prompt readers to take a fresh look at

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the field. For example, van der Wal's discussion of human resources in Chapter 7 avoids a summary of routine tasks. Instead, he challenges readers to think about the implications of generational change, models of mentoring in the workforce, and the changes that will occur due to further computerization and robotization. As another example, Chapter 10 encourages managers to develop long time horizons. Some books do little more than recognize political constraints to long-term planning. This book explains how foresight exercises and scenario planning can be used by public managers to monitor their external environment and make trade-off decisions more explicit in the policy-making process. In sum, the book succeeds in prompting readers to engage in fresh, research-informed thinking about core tasks in public management, and prompts managers to retool their task repertoire for the twenty-first century.

Instructors who consider the book for classroom use should also be aware of the book's structure and presentation of information. Each chapter begins with a vignette that describes how megatrends complicate the work of public managers, making salient dilemmas that must be confronted by new management thinking. While these vignettes prompt thinking about management demands, the stylized accounts sometimes lack reference to context or facts, leaving the reader guessing about how government agencies actually responded to the problem. This style may trouble faculty and students who hope to learn from real-world cases with more detailed descriptions of the successes and failures of public managers. Still, the book's many excerpt boxes provide real-world examples from around the globe with clear references for additional exploration. Through these examples, readers gain insight into the management demands presented in the book. The narrative cites and synthesizes an array of classic and contemporary research in public management, making the book a good spring board for additional reading of the public administration research literature. When discussed, specific management tasks tend to be conveyed in list format in ancillary boxes. Students seeking a simple step-by-step guide to management should look elsewhere. This book tackles big picture demands on the manager.

Van der Wal's central argument is revisited in the final chapter. A management context characterized by VUCA requires a different type of management from the twenty-first century manager. He writes that "the overall trends detailed in this book all point towards the need for public managers to become more adaptive, networked, communicative, entrepreneurial, innovative, smart and agile" (301). Two strengths of the book may enhance public management education and the integration of theory and practice. First, by focusing on management demands that stem from global megatrends, van der Wal is giving attention to larger forces shaping the administrative state. Roberts (2014) has admonished the field for neglecting such forces, but this book will push public managers to think critically about the boundaries of the state. Second, the book promises and delivers a presentation of public management challenges around the globe. Van der Wal explains this global engagement came about in part through his teaching and training of managers around the globe. The diversity of examples should help educators present public management as a global field, which may help students think more about the transferability of their competencies across borders.

As a textbook on public management, *The 21st Century Public Manager* will prompt fresh management thinking and prepare managers to work in a globalizing profession characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Yet, van der Wal's work raises normative questions for the field. Two problems stand out. First, is public management global? To rephrase, are management tasks shaped more by global megatrends than by constitutional regimes and the development of the administrative state within a given country? After reading van der Wal's presentation of public management, readers should consider how thinking about public management is anchored within individual nation-states versus universal management scenarios. If the megatrends challenging public managers are global, will scholarship engage this global context through more comparative research to discern when and how the context of individual nation-states and governance systems matter for management?

The second question is related, and stands out largely through omission in the text. How does democracy matter? While the megatrends and management demands confront managers around the globe, van der Wal acknowledges in the conclusion, "It is likely that public managers in liberal democratic environments will be more enabled to create space for collaboration, open innovation, and genuine stakeholder participation and crowdsourcing" (307). Many scholars and practitioners would hope for this hypothesis to be more fully developed and explored within the book. Van der Wal's presentation of public management frequently acknowledges diverse stakeholder interests, but does not fully engage the distinction between stakeholders and a democratic polity. From Waldo (1948) to contemporary work by Durant (2000), this distinction has been central to the evolution of public administration theory in the United States. As the world is rocked by VUCA, not to mention geopolitical conflict and populism, our thinking about public management must more fully engage questions about democratic engagement and accountability. Perhaps, a future edition of van der Wal's book will explore this question. Certainly, the VUCA forces and global megatrends conveyed in the book will generate debate in the public management classroom and challenge both scholars and practitioners to think critically about the future of the field.

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