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The Practice of Transformational Stewardship,
review of *Transforming Public and Nonprofit
Organizations*, by James Kee and Kathryn
Newcomer

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Kee, J.E. and Newcomer, K. E. (2008). *Transforming Public and Non-Profit Organizations: Stewardship for Leading Change*

Alexandria, VA: Management Concepts, Inc., 301 pages, Paperback, US \$39.00, ISBN 978-1-56726-227-8

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In the past quarter century, the theory and practice of public administration has undergone a dramatic change. Public organizations are increasingly decentralized and multi-sectoral. This creates new challenges for organizing and leading public sector organizations as well as for sustaining the democratic character of public administration. This book provides students, practitioners and academics with an understanding of how to lead change in an era of new governance.

The authors, James E. “Jed” Kee and Kathryn E. Newcomer are faculty at the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration at The George Washington University (GWU). Kathryn is Director of the School and they co-direct the Midge Smith Center for Evaluation Effectiveness.

Prior to joining the GWU faculty, Kee was counsel to the New York State Legislature and served under two Utah governors as state planning coordinator, state budget director, and executive director of the Department of Administrative Services. He teaches and conducts research in the areas of budget theory and policy; intergovernmental finance; state-federal management issues; and public sector productivity, management, and leadership. His extensive list of publications includes the book *Out of Balance* published with former Utah governor Scott Matheson.

Kathryn Newcomer is an internationally recognized expert in program evaluation and routinely conducts research and training for federal and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations on performance measurement and program evaluation. She teaches public and nonprofit program evaluation, research design, and applied statistics. Newcomer has also published extensively and lectures internationally, including *Getting Results: A Guide for Federal Leaders and Managers*.

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Kee and Newcomer provide a practical but theoretically grounded message for those involved in leading public sector change. The first three chapters are crucial because they provide a solid foundation for the approach. Chapter 1 is entitled “The Change Imperative” and delineates the environment within which public managers operate. As the authors see it, the present environment is dynamic, if not volatile. The challenge is to help transform traditional organizations into collaborative entities, all the while sustaining the values and norms that are consistent with the public interest. Kee and Newcomer point out that such a proposition is risky because change is never easy and often ends up at best technocratic. The other important aspect of this chapter is that it provides detail about the social, economic and political factors that have forced the public sector to shift its mode of organizing from hierarchy to heterarchy. Finally, the authors emphasize the importance of the public interest as a normative ideal that can serve as a guiding principle for those leading public sector organizational change.

Chapter 2 is entitled “Transformational Stewardship in the Public Interest.” The chapter provides a useful summary of leadership theory and parses the important distinctions between leaders and managers. The authors favor a model of transformational stewardship. They build on the work of Peter Bloch who argued that stewards have a sense of organizational accountability and trust that differs from other notions of leadership because it is grounded in service to others rather than self-interest. The work of Mary Parker Follett also informs Kee and Newcomer’s view. Transformational stewards are “change-centric” and have a broad spectrum of competencies. The intra-personal level includes these competencies: ethical, reflective/learning-oriented, empathetic, visionary/foresight, creative/innovative. One must also have an operational mindset, which includes these competencies: trustee/caretaker, mission-driven, accountable, integrative/systems thinker, attention to detail, comfortable with ambiguity. At the interpersonal level, the transformational steward is: a trust builder, empowering, democratic, power sharing, and a coalition builder.

Chapter 3 explains their model for leading change in the public interest. The authors make a compelling argument for the role of executive leadership in diagnosing change risk and organizational capability, strategizing and making the case for change, implementing and sustaining change, and reinforcing change and creating a change-centric organization. The way in which such change management occurs is organized around four constructs: change complexity, sociopolitical environment, organizational capacity and stakeholders. Embedded in each of these four constructs is an overriding awareness of the normative role of the public interest. Their model is quite good at explaining the complex issues of leading and managing change. For example, they suggest that assessing the “footprint” of a change initiative and its likely path can help leaders address resistance, as well as anticipate the amount of personnel and time required for effective implementation of the change initiative. Further, the book offers strategies for revising the change initiative, if there is loss of momentum or if there are unanticipated responses owing to internal or external factors.

Chapter 4 details several cases that the authors studied to develop their model of transformational stewardship and change. These cases include public agencies like the Veterans Health Administration and non-profit organizations like the N Street

Village, which serves homeless men and women, providing them a wide array of vital services. The value of this chapter is that it shows how to apply the model of change.

Chapters 5 through 8 discuss key leadership processes. They include communicating and collaborating with stakeholders, creating a change-centric culture, building change implementation mechanisms, and measuring change performance. The final portion of the book includes a detailed analysis of leadership in emergency management networks and two chapters that summarize the case for leading transformational change. There are also two useful instruments: one that assesses organizational readiness for change and another that measures the capacity of a leader to become a transformational steward.

I have used the book with master's level students. They like it because it tackles theoretical issues but also can be used like a fieldbook. I also supplement the use of this book with the recommended readings found at the end of each chapter. As the literature on public sector collaboration grows, Kee and Newcomer's book stands out because it combines theoretical insight with practical application. The widely respected experience and expertise of its authors affirms its legitimacy.

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