

Winter 2010

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

Gary S. Marshall

University of Nebraska at Omaha, gmarshal@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/pubadfacpub>

 Part of the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

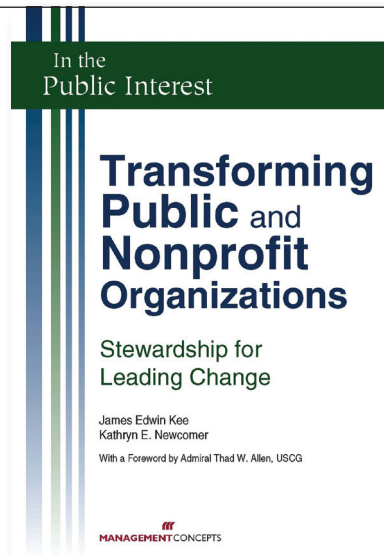
Recommended Citation

Marshall, Gary S., ““The Practice of Transformational Stewardship,” review of *Transforming Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, by James Kee and Kathryn Newcomer” (2010). *Public Administration Faculty Publications*. 74.

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/pubadfacpub/74>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Public Administration at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Administration Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.





James Edwin Kee and Kathryn E. Newcomer, *Transforming Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Stewardship for Leading Change* (Management Concepts, 2008)

The Practice of Transformational Stewardship

Reviewed by Gary S. Marshall

The concept of transformational stewardship as a force for change was explored in *Transforming Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Stewardship for Leading Change* by James Edwin Kee and Kathryn E. Newcomer. But how does a public manager become a transformational steward? How is the concept of stewardship related to public leadership?

A Transformational Steward

One clear example of a transformational steward in the federal government is the recently retired commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral Thad W. Allen. In the book's foreword, as well as in a recent speech at George Washington University (GW), Allen espoused the aspects of an effective transformational steward. He noted that public administrators must learn to expect the unexpected and that the challenge for public leaders is "to create organizations that are change-centric learning organizations."

Stewardship, according to Allen, requires a higher calling than just doing a job; it calls for proactive leaders who "project their organizations and their personal leadership skills against a future set of challenges."

Drawing on his experiences as Coast Guard Commandant and Incident Commander for both Hurricane Katrina and the recent BP oil spill, Allen makes a number of key points regarding stewardship responsibilities that should serve as a guide for any manager in the federal government or at the state and local level who strive to be transformational stewards.

- There is always a gap between public law and new crises or situations. Laws tend to address past problems not future ones. Leaders must be flexible and creative when finding ways to use existing law, forging alliances, and developing ad hoc mechanisms that address an immediate problem.
- American federalism requires coordination among all branches of government. Federal managers must be sensitive to state and local officials who have their own legal authority and are, in many ways, more intimately informed about how policy affects local citizens.
- Federal officials have a fiduciary responsibility to fulfill the legal and financial requirements of federal law. Federal managers need to be constantly aware that they are trustees or stewards of the public's money.
- Problems—whether hurricanes, oil spills, global warming—are not solved by a single sector or level of government. Transformational stewards must create cross-sector collaboration, which requires recognition of each partner's roles, strengths, and responsibilities. It also needs a leader to form a "unity of effort" even in the absence of a "unity of command."
- Leaders can never communicate or collaborate enough. Transparency of information breeds self-correcting behavior.
- The nation needs its governmental systems to work for us and our organizations. Leaders should measure what is important, not merely what is mandated.
- Leaders must recognize and manage risks. This requires a careful diagnosis of risks facing an

organization and preparation to address or minimize them.

- Organizations need to develop governance structures that facilitate an inter-organizational and cross-sectoral environment. Structures such as the Incident Command Structure (originally developed by the U.S. Forest Service for fighting fires) and a newly created Council of Governors can facilitate inter-agency planning and coordinated action.
- Government cannot do everything. Stewards must recognize the limits of government action and call upon the private and nonprofit sectors to fill the gaps that inevitably occur.

suggestions and additional readings to better understand and address areas of weakness.

More importantly, results garnered from the instrument can be used to determine what organizational participants and stakeholders think about the leader's capacity for transformational stewardship. For example, in a recent application of the Leadership Change-Risk Diagnostic Instrument, findings indicated that the leader had strong interpersonal skills useful in forging new relationships, maintaining collaborations, and mediating conflict.

The findings also suggested that the leader encouraged employees to share power, practiced ethical leadership, and was sensitive to changes in the external environment.

Kee and Newcomer's four-stage model for leading change in the public interest—focusing on change complexity, sociopolitical environment, organizational capacity, and internal and external stakeholders—is effective when working with practitioners.

Leadership Change-Risk Diagnostic Tool

Many public managers are comfortable with and often excited about the concept of transformational stewardship because it offers a dynamic approach to solving public problems while recognizing key organizational and public values.

Managers examining a particular issue can use the book's Leadership Change-Risk Diagnostic Instrument to analyze how the organization is undergoing change. The advantage of the instrument is that it provides a diagnostic tool that enables the manager to find in the book practical

At the same time, results advised the leader to initiate strategic planning efforts, embrace innovation, and experiment more with new organizational practices.

Kee and Newcomer's four-stage model for leading change in the public interest—focusing on change complexity, sociopolitical environment, organizational capacity, and internal and external stakeholders—is effective when working with practitioners. For example, the four dimensions can be used by community leaders to assess the readiness of their coalitions to change from an emphasis on

substance abuse prevention to implementation of results-oriented programs that engage in direct service provision.

Transformational Stewardship 360-Degree Assessment

Co-author James Edwin Kee has students use the Transformational Stewardship 360-Degree Assessment instrument as part of an individual project in which they assess their own leadership strengths and weaknesses. Using the instrument as a true 360-degree assessment is particularly valuable for those students who have had several years of work and management experience.

Chapter 10 provides several tables that relate the attributes of transformational stewards to responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and abilities, and offers suggestions for developmental assignments.

For example, if someone scores low on systems thinking or creative and innovative capabilities, Table 10.4 suggests readings on organizational learning and volunteering. It also recommends assignments such as an after-action review in which past responses to events are analyzed in terms of what went well and what could be approved.

Admiral Allen, in his speech at GW, noted the importance of such organizational learning. Allen explained how he and his team were able to apply lessons learned from Katrina, such as the need to coordinate air space, to the Haiti earthquake response and lessons from Haiti to the BP oil spill.

In another illustration, the 360 assessment can be used to evaluate whether a leader has such attributes as empathy and coalition-building, and trust-building skills. Based

on responses, Table 10.1 suggests practical learning assignments such as conducting a “stakeholder audit” to assess who is most affected by the organization’s actions. Facilitating a stakeholder forum and trying to understand stakeholder perspectives are additional approaches suggested.

What’s Next?

Transforming Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Stewardship for Leading Change offers practical tips on communication, stakeholder management, performance management, and other critical areas necessary for today’s leaders. It provides workable instruments that readers can use to enhance their leadership skills or manage a specific issue such as a change initiative.

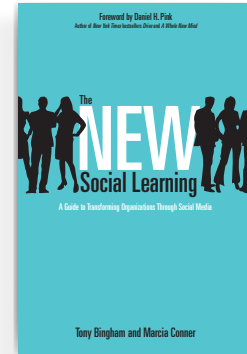
Gary S. Marshall is a professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His research is focused on collaborative practices in public sector organizations and human identity as it relates to work in public agencies. He is a senior fellow at the Center for Collaboration Science and is also co-editor of the *Lacanian Compass*, a U.S.-based publication on the work of Jacques Lacan. Marshall has published works in *Administration and Society*, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *Public Administration Review* and *The American Behavioral Scientist*. Contact him at gmarshall@mail.unomaha.edu.

Kee and Newcomer are developing a web-based instrument to facilitate the Transformational Steward 360-Degree Assessment and provide timely feedback to participants to supplement the book.

REFERENCES

Admiral Thad W. Allen, “Unprecedented Events: Unprecedented Leadership Challenges,” speech given on September 24, 2010 upon his receipt of George Washington University’s highest public service award, the Colin Powell Public Service Award.

The NEW Social Learning



by
Tony Bingham & Marcia Conner

A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media

“This new book shows the myriad ways smart organizations are leveraging new technologies and strategies to support and sustain social learning at work.”

Jane Bozarth
Author, *Social Media for Trainers*



TheNewSocialLearning.com

0811011.6Z220

store.astd.org

