

David G. Carnevale. *Organizational Development in the Public Sector*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), pp. 150. \$27.00
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Organizational Development in the Public Sector is not just a great introduction for students to the practice of organizational development (OD), but also a wonderful addition to the public administrator's professional library. It's really a primer with depth—there's not a wasted word in the book. That's saying something for OD, a professional discipline which is often ridiculed for its triumph of jargon over substance. One of the habits that I developed in graduate school was to highlight important passages while reading. The temptation here is to highlight everything because it all seems so essential.

The business world gave birth to OD and developed most of its methodologies. Carnevale places OD firmly within the organizational behavior literature relevant to public administration and politics. He backs up the theory and the techniques with memorable stories of his own consulting work in a variety of public service settings. That alone makes it a worthwhile read. The book begins with an overview of management thinking as it began to evolve at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries. Carnevale discusses the contributions of Weber and Frederick Taylor, whose mechanistic perspectives of business organization became ingrained in the DNA of public administration theory and practice. The human relations and systems models offered important counterpoints to the overly rational bureaucratic and scientific management paradigms.

A possibly underappreciated aspect of this book is that it is truly a jumping point to gain access to OD's vast literature. In one instance the author lists "Various Intervention Tools for Facilitating Change" and borrowing from the work of French and Bell, he links these to the various target groups such as individuals, teams, groups, and organizations as a whole. So, imagine for example that you are an OD consultant hired to facilitate intergroup relations in a public organization, you can see here that several techniques are available including organizational mirroring, partnering, process consultation, third party mediation, and survey feedback. While Carnevale does not cover any of these extensively, you now know where to look and what words to use in your search.

The main theme of this book is the importance of the human dimension. Carnevale does not use the language specifically, but his concerns about public management echo the "administrative evil" described by Adams and Balfour. According to their work focusing on such public administration failures as facilitating the Holocaust or ignoring warnings against launching Space Shuttle Challenger, bureaucrats can do great harm—even unintentionally—when they focus so intently on following procedures and adhering to rules that they forget that they are making decisions that affect real people (2004).

A case in point is Carnevale's description of an event in an unnamed southwestern city. A group of over 600 citizens gathered at a local church to voice their concerns about an unsafe road. They felt that the city was not taking their concerns seriously. During the course of the meeting, they documented hundreds of accidents along the roadway. Then a city engineer rose to respond. "Armed with eighty slides," he "started by saying that the state does not count individual deaths in a wreck but only the number of cars where someone died. The engineer was interrupted by a woman who said, 'I lost my daughter and grandson in a fiery crash on that road. They are not statistics, they were humans.' Mercifully, a more senior engineer took the podium from the first engineer, who was complaining that he had ten slides left to show" (p. 88). This story also illustrates the challenge for an OD consultant to intervene and establish communication among "the multiple interests that swirl around government" (p. 88). In fact, a key point of the book is that the complexity of politics makes the public sector fundamentally different for OD intervention than the private sector. Carnevale observes that it's not uncommon in the public sector to begin negotiations with a press

conference. In business, the parties usually resort to public disclosure only when they reach an impasse. Along with stories from his own consulting experience, Carnevale is not above using examples from popular culture such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Hunt for Red October*, and *Apollo 13*. The familiarity with these popular movies should help students better access the intimidating style of most OD literature.

This book addresses the intersection of power, politics and organizational dynamics. “The public environment is a stew of politics, low trust, short-term thinking, competing values, conflicting objectives, and a terrain that does not support transformational leadership” (p. 26). Carnevale prescribes tapping into that elusive expertise that only the frontline managers actually possess. “The practical problem is how to release the power of experiential learning that is latent in the human resources of organizations” (p. 63). However, the book does not advocate “hijacking what people know” (p. 64) in great contrast to the premises of scientific management itself. It’s about empowerment—a loaded term often used and abused by people in power who pay it lip service while never really fostering a participatory workplace. Carnevale himself makes fun of what he refers to as “management drivel” and “boilerplate rhetoric” (p. 50). Carnevale cites literature which suggests that in spite of the lack of OD intervention in the public sector, and the inherent challenges faced by consultants, “Public OD is as successful, and perhaps realizes slightly more positive outcomes, than private experiences” (p. 37).

Many fortunate students have had the privilege of being schooled by this eminent and distinguished professor from the University of Oklahoma. From my own personal experience, I can tell you that he was a master teacher. While I read this book, I could not help but hear the authoritative and ever enthusiastic voice of Dr. Carnevale as if I were once again participating in one of his evening graduate sessions. I’m thinking now about building a new course around this book. I can also see its broad applicability to a variety of courses from the introductory public administration classes to the more advanced. Certainly, this book would be a wonderful contribution to any organizational behavior class. *Organizational Development in the Public Sector* would be extremely advantageous to our public administration students who tend to be a bit more pragmatically oriented than regular political science majors. Through Carnevale’s numerous anecdotes, they can easily see the

practical applications. Meanwhile, Carnevale is sneaking in an incredible amount of theory which should help them better grasp the entirety of OD and its ultimate purposes. From there, they can take advantage of the overwhelming variety of social technologies that OD offers.

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References

Adams, Guy B. and Balfour, Danny L. 2004. *Unmasking Administrative Evil* (Revised Edition). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.