

she explains carefully how different chapters suit different audiences (for scholars, Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 are particularly important). The book is well presented and easy to navigate in for the reader.

For a public management audience, the book can serve as an inspiration to do more research on what public managers actually do when they act strategically. The book can lead to more research on the practice and practices of strategic behaviour. After a number of years studying public management reforms, it is perhaps now time to concentrate even more on how public managers have responded and reacted to all these structural, cultural and process changes that have occurred. Jarzabkowski's work can be an opportunity and an invitation to adopt a strategy as practice perspective on a variety of public sector organizations' actions in relation to the reforms. One particular area where the strategic perspective could be relevant is in relation to the strategic behaviour in response to the governments and consultants that advocate use of performance-based management techniques across a wide spectrum of public policy areas.

Jarzabkowski's new book presents an important theoretical framework focusing on strategizing and strategic practices, and it is readily applicable to the world of public management where it is a welcome addition to the emerging literature on how public managers can shape and implement strategies. *Strategy as practice* deserves a wide audience within the public management community.

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Carsten Greve

Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

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**Christopher Hood and David Heald (eds)**

**Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Some books are dangerous. This was the sense under which the Church in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, attempted to outlaw Gutenberg's printing press. Instead of gently promoting existing myths, beliefs and power structures, good books risked outbreaks of the opposite. They questioned prevailing thought; proposed new ways of thinking; and crafted insights on which the views and actions of dominant societal actors could be judged.

This book, *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* does just that. Edited by Christopher Hood and David Heald and published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, it looks at transparency from four perspectives. It is both a terrific and timely addition to libraries dealing with matters of governance. Throughout its thirteen chapters, the book outlines from whence the idea of transparency came; transparency as both a solution and a problem; how, through case studies, institutional behaviour can thwart transparency reforms; and the meaning of transparency in the information age. So why do I think this book is ‘dangerous’? There are four reasons.

First, it questions the ‘rise and rise of transparency’, and the common notion that ‘we are living today in a special age of transparency’, as Hood puts it in his final comments. While freedom of information (FOI) regimes and formal disclosure rules on government have certainly resulted in an increase in nominal transparency, Hood concludes that there has not been a rise in effective transparency. A counterbalance here, to his mind, has been the accompanying trend to privatization and outsourcing in which transparency expectations of government have not been maintained. He also concludes that much of the rise of transparency has been ‘linguistic re-labelling, the rise of a word over other words’. This has resulted in transparency becoming a widespread ‘recipe for good governance’ and ‘a cure-all’. Yet, do institutions make compensating adjustments to overcome the cultural desires for greater transparency? Hood concludes that they do. To his mind, the optimistic view about the effectiveness of transparency provisions ‘is far from proven’. And is transparency a universal good? Heald suspects not, and that trade-offs are likely with reforms. So, in an age of information technology and high public expectations, and with government media advisors turning ‘blame shifting and blame avoidance into an art-form’, this critique of transparency suggests that ‘a strong element of practical scepticism about the way transparency measures work out on the ground’ is justified.

The second reason for this judgement is the extensive range of disciplines covered in this book. Birkinshaw’s legal Chapter 3 covers transparency as a human right, Hood’s initial chapter covers the history of transparency, and Chapters 6 and 10 by Prat and Stasavage respectively examine economic models which might underpin transparency reform activities. We now know from a public policy perspective that citizens need information in order to make sensible, intelligent and accurate judgements on democracy, and that transparency can reveal arbitrariness, corruption, or repression. But did you know, for instance, about town meetings of Salem in 1636, Sweden’s initial Freedom of the Press Act in 1766 and Emperor Tai Zhong in 627–49 in China, all of which reflect the ideal of ‘open-dealings’ with government, along with Bentham’s ideas on transparency in 1802? Moreover, Chapters 11 (Camp) and 12 (Margetts) both cover transparency from the lens of information technology – and its new challenges.

The third reason is that this book covers a wealth of approaches from theoretical to pragmatic. Yet it is still coherent. Heald develops a useful early conceptual model for transparency and later examines a series of trade-offs that are probably experienced in considering changes to transparency. He warns, though, that it is crucial to evaluate

carefully any such trade-offs. And I found Prat's insights presented on the Principle Agent Model in Chapter 6 fascinating. Brimming with relevant examples, he argues that there are both strong theoretical arguments in favour of complete disclosure as well as a number of powerful potential objections to the full transparency principle. He none the less comes down on the side that 'available economics research supports the idea that full transparency should be the default option'. But this contrasts the much more sober practical assessment of O'Neill, whose more battle-weary argument was that efforts towards transparency do not guarantee effective communication. 'Transparency has few enemies', she says, 'but it also offers fewer and more limited benefits than is widely assumed'.

The fourth reason for the label of dangerous is the extensive coverage of case material which adds a delightful appreciation and surprising empirical depth to a subject which could have otherwise have ended up as dry and boring. So, while several authors acknowledge rightly that too little systematic empirical research on transparency exists, we find Roberts (in Chapter 7) and McDonald (Chapter 8) both discussing FOI legislation and its effects, Stasavage extending the economic ideas introduced earlier examining the EU Council of Ministers and Savage (Chapter 9) looking at the EU budget rules, and turning these topics into interesting lessons. Did you know, for instance, that 'Greece gained its EMU [Economic and Monetary Union] membership in 2000 through deception and a breakdown in the EU's efforts at budgetary transparency'... it 'intentionally failed to disclose and then misclassified the data it submitted to the European Commission'; a remarkable example of a transparency deficit used to advantage, according to Savage's account. And that 'contests over official information are fought as fiercely as they were before the introduction of FOI law' in governments around the world, according to Roberts. Such tussles 'over official information will *increase* in intensity, rather than decrease', and are predicated either in deep distrust of government officials in the case of information requestors, or fear about the growing inability to govern effectively in the case of officials. And did you consider that a 'culture of compromise' is derived directly from the secrecy of the setting rather than its transparency, as Stasavage puts it? And what of the transparency of governments which link digital government with transparency, such as Singapore, or China? To the minds of Margetts, millions of pages onto websites may well meet citizen expectations, but they do not guarantee transparency.

So how, overall, might we rate the book *Transparency*? There is little doubt that Hood and Heald have put together a first-class team of authors across multiple disciplines. There is also little doubt that they have addressed transparency well – its history, ideas from different disciplines – and achieved their aim of taking discussions of transparency beyond simple statements of first principles. In this vein, the book is clearly an intellectual success. And while acknowledging the reality that too little empirical transparency research exists, they have admirably added several case studies to our global database of experience and subjected these to careful review. Both the conceptual chapters and empirical chapters have added to our intellectual store and as well,

chapters on transparency in an information age have courageously covered new ground. To me, *Transparency* deserves a place in all libraries and to be widely read by those who claim to govern well, those who claim to teach about governing well and those who claim to research the domain of governing well. And yes, many readers ought to beware that the ideas presented in this book might be a little unsettling. The simplistic rallying call differs markedly from the complex reality of transparency, which has both positive and negative impacts, and is extraordinarily difficult to pin down as we quite rightly debate the best democratic balance that ought to be maintained today. So is transparency really ‘the key to better governance’, as the title of the book asks? Why not live dangerously and read the book to find out.

Graeme Hodge

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

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**Tom Christensen and Per Lægreid (eds)**

***Autonomy and Regulation: Coping with Agencies in the Modern State***

Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing

ISBN-13 978 – 1 – 84542 – 859 – 4

*Autonomy and Regulation* brings together an international selection of scholars in the field of public policy and a topic with current relevance. In their 2001 publication on new public management, the two editors Tom Christensen and Per Lægreid put forward a transformative perspective highlighting the variation in implementing NPM ideas and programmes. Their new book picks up this perspective by focusing more specifically ‘on regulatory reforms and the autonomization and agencification of public sector organisations’ (p. 3). Agencies have become quite a powerful theme in public administration discourse. The OECD in its 2005 report *Modernising Government* regards the creation of agencies and independent regulators as ‘the most important organisational change that has taken place within central government’ in the past two decades (p. 110). Whereas the earlier discussion was often dominated by practitioners stressing the positive impact of such arrangements on performance, ‘the core of the debate’ now seems to have shifted to the question ‘what institutional features give the best balance between autonomy and control?’ (p. 117). It is in this context that *Autonomy and Regulation* makes its major contribution.

As its general aim, the book ‘seeks to provide a theoretical basis for the combined study’ of regulatory reforms and agencification and ‘to present comparative data and analyses of the processes, effects and implications’ of these reforms (p. 3). Starting from the observation of an emerging ‘regulatory state’ and inherent tensions in the NPM movement, it explores the challenges of control, co-ordination and accountability within a more fragmented public sector in ‘the aftermath of the NPM movement’ (p.