

Book Analysis “The Politics of Public Management” by David A. Good

I was given the book “the Politics of Public Management” by David A. Good to read for Ethics class. This book discusses the Transitional Jobs Fund (TJF) provided by the Human Resources and Development Canada department of the Government of Canada. This fund was the subject of intense scrutiny by the media and public due to the release of an internal department ordered audit. This audit looked at the administrative operation of this program and the money that it gave as grants to selected groups to create jobs in areas of low employment. The program did have some issues with how the grant form were completed and chosen due to it being a national program but the media blew the “missing money” out of proportion by not reporting the facts. The government also was at fault by letting the ministers be involved in the selection of groups receiving the grants which created selection bias. All of the blame was shifted to the public sector employees who operated the program but in reality they were just doing their jobs.

The book begins by discussing the reforms taking place in the Canadian Government in the 1990’s. The Government was undergoing changes at this time with cutting of public service jobs and the decentralization of authority. Public servants developed a system to administer the TJF by increasing service flexibility, creating outputs with accountability and increasing discretion. One of the ways they achieved this was to include the members of parliament in the selection of the grant recipients. This allowed for the program to be region specific and the flexible criteria allowed for a wide variety of possible grant applicants. The public servants also used a variety of external studies to determine the success of the grants. One such study for the evaluation of the program was an internal administrative audit. This audit was done at the request of the program head and found some administrative errors in filling out forms, incomplete data, etc. with program grants. Data was not collected in a uniform way across the country so data was difficult to compare across Canada. The minister of the HRDC decided to publicly release the audit instead of simply making it available on the internet. This is what began the media storm. Mean while the minister had already put into place actions to improve the administration practices of the HRDC.

The media ran with the story and thus started the “Billion Dollars in Federal Grant Money Missing” stories. The media did not focus on the aspect that there was not really a billion dollars of grant money missing but that due to administrative errors not all grants had their paperwork completed correctly. In actuality about \$ 85 000 was unaccounted for. The Minister of HRDC was under fire for not keeping closer watch on the TJF. There were demands for her resignation as Minister, for firing of public employees and demands for answers to where the money went. There was also some issues about the fact that most of the grants had gone to ridings where the elected officials happened to be prominent cabinet member of the Liberal party (then in power). Prime Minister Chretien had many grants go to recipients in his riding alone. The media continued to push the idea that money was missing when in fact it was not. The media sensationalized an issue that the Minister had predicted would be a non-issue. The media was using a stage 2 of Kohlberg’s Paradigm. They were using the audit to meet their

own needs and not report the actual information provided. The result was a huge public outcry for what actually happened to the money.

The public servants were doing their jobs in the midst of jobs cuts and less managerial oversight. This provided the environment for different data collection data and differences in the program delivery nationwide. The public servants were ultimately the ones who paid the price, managers were fired and the department was restructured. The public servants were the only ones who did not do anything wrong but paid the price. The media was responsible for the public outcry and the need for people to lose their jobs, and the bureaucrats were responsible for deciding where the money would go which further fueled the public outrage by the appearance of buying votes. The federal government operates at a stage 3 due to the fact they are concerned with how others see them and the need to save face publicly. The highest operating of Kohlberg's stages is by the public employees. They are operating at a stage 4 by doing their jobs and respecting authority.

This book is good for employees of the federal public service. It shows how the government must balance several issues in the operation of its programs. It provides an understanding as to what can happen in the public service when administration gets sloppy. It is helpful to see that the media can easily twist information to serve their purposes. One can deduce the stages of reasoning of the groups in the book but there is no real direct thought on the ethics of what happened. The author alludes to that fact that the government must balance ethical issues such as program delivery and cutting costs, etc. but that is the only direct ethical reference. One can see the lack of ethics on behalf of the media and politicians when understanding what really happened to the TJF.

This book is helpful to me to understand what my manager faces on a daily basis because I work in the federal public service. I see parallels in my department and the HRDC. We must all balance program delivery and service with money available. I see that it is important to be vigilant in my job to protect myself and my department in the case of media or public outrage. I must be sure to fill out forms correctly and do my best every day. This book would not be helpful to the average individual working in the public health field.

This book was an analysis of the HRDC audit of the TJF. It was a dry read. It would be possible but difficult to relate it to the ethics course. There is a lot of reading for the value of the ethical lessons contained therein. There is nothing relating to the field of public health or specifically environmental health in this book. This book deals with the operation of government and the relations between media and government. This book would be interesting for those involved with grant programs or those managing government departments.