

The Postbureaucratic State

By Jing Wang

Elaine C. Kamarck, The End of Government ... As We Know It: Making Public Policy Work (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2007. pp.157. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN-13:978-1-58826-494-7.

In the last decades of the 20th century, many political leaders found that the limits of bureaucracy made government revolution unavoidable, as shown by Ronald Reagan's declaration: "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (Reagan, 1981). Politicians did not lose their enthusiasm for solving public problems but they became aware that they had to solve them in ways that did not work in the structure of bureaucracy. We have seen in recent years the beginning of a remarkable era of experimentation in government, driven by a sense that bureaucracies of the 20th century were simply not suitable for policy work in the new century. The limits of bureaucratic government are resulting in revolution to move beyond the formal structures of government.

Based on closer inspection, Elaine C. Kamarck argues that the revolt against government was and is a revolt against bureaucracy (a revolt that has taken place in Western countries) and will develop throughout the world. Kamarck, a former senior policy advisor to the Clinton administration, is now a professor of public policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Her book *The End of Government ... As We Know It: Making Public Policy Work* is a nonpartisan examination of the failings of bureaucratic government with newer, leaner, and more creative approaches, keeping with the fast-paced and ever-changing information age.

Kamarck argues in this book that old forms of bureaucratic government are becoming out of date and that government in the future will be characterized by new modes of policy implementation. "Reinvented public-sector organizations", "government by network", and "government by market" are the three main categories in her analysis of the postbureaucratic state. Postbureaucratic state, in her argument, is smaller government with talented and highly skilled government executives (p.143).

In the beginning of the book, Kamarck quickly glances at the revolution in governing. She regards the 20th century — in organizational terms — as a bureaucratic century. "The federal government and most state and local governments were, for most of the century, governments of clerks" (p. 3).

The growth in citizen distrust of government in the last decades of the 20th century had its roots in failing policy implementation and performance in the traditional ponderous, inflexible, and obsolete bureaucratic system. The movement of "New Public Management", a series of innovations using the economic market as a model for political and administrative relationships (Nagel, 1997, p.349), began in Britain and New Zealand in the 1980s, and then was carried out by state governments in the USA, and then moved to the federal government. In the information age of the 21st century, according to Kamarck's observation, almost all the world's most advanced democracies implement policy in various ways, and there exists new and reformed bureaucratic modes along with traditional bureaucracies.

Kamarck divides these new modes of implementation into three general categories: reinvented public-sector organizations, government by network, and government by market. Reinvented government is government shorn of many public sector trappings and geared toward performance. Govern-

ment by network is government that makes a conscious choice to implement policy by creating, through its power to contract and to fund, a network of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Government by market involves the use of governmental power to create a market that fulfills a public purpose. Kamarck shows how these

"In the postbureaucratic age, accountable and democratic governments will continue to drive innovations in the way of policy implementation."

implementation tools can be matched to their optimal implementation mode by breaking policy problems down by types. She concludes by portraying with a matrix for "matching means to ends" (Table 2.1, p. 21). However, efficacy and efficiency are not the only measures of effective public policy, as she explores the issues of democratic accountability and the trade-offs between innovation and accountability that accompany each new mode of policy implementation. The author then turns to the failures of what she calls "bureaucratic instinct" in two very different policy areas which also be considered throughout the book, welfare dependence and homeland security, and concludes with a matrix for the evaluation of each policy problem (Table 4.1, p. 57; Table 4.2, p. 58).

In the second half of the book, Kamarck describes each implementation mode in more depth and then applies it to those two policy areas. She explores the characteristics of the three modes and discusses how each of them applies to the policy problems of welfare dependence and homeland security. In the concluding chapter, Kamarck mentions several flaws of the three new modes if they are not used properly. She concludes with thoughts of modern policy challenges with involving not only the leadership of the government but also the Congress and legislative bodies in the postbureaucratic state. In the postbureaucratic age, accountable and democratic governments will continue to drive innovations in the way of policy implementation.

Kamarck's provocative work makes it clear that, in addition to figuring out what to do, today's government leaders face an unprecedented number of options when it comes to how to do things. The challenge of government increasingly will be to choose an implementation mode, match it to a policy problem, and manage it well in the postbureaucratic world. The main contribution of this book is its unfolding of a general picture of the postbureaucratic state. "The end of government" in her words means the end of the traditional bureaucratic governments. She argues throughout this book that what we are seeing is the replacement of the traditional bureaucratic approach with new modes of government to "make public policy work" and keep with the information age economy.

One of the strengths of her book is the concrete analysis, which connects to the reality of U.S. government. Real-world examples are used to help the readers understand how new alternatives can best be applied. She chooses welfare dependence and homeland security as examples to discuss the new modes, not only because they illustrate the wide applicability of the modes, but also relate to her working experience. In 1990s, she served in the Clinton/Gore White House and worked directly with Gore to create the Reinventing Government project. She also worked on the president's welfare reform task force, Community Empowerment Board, Olympics task force, and the Vice President's Airline Safety and Security Commission. Based on these experiences, she elaborately describes federal government reform against traditional bureaucratic system in the Clinton/Gore administration and provides abundant policy implementation cases for the new modes' innovations. Former vice president Al Gore gives high praise to her work: "Elaine Kamarck shows us what we can expect if we want to go beyond the tired rhetoric of left and right to create a government capable of dealing with all the new challenges of this new century. She has had more

practical experience with this challenge...than anyone else in the world" (back cover).

Moreover, Kamarck's academic contribution of exploring new capable modes for policy implementation makes her distinctive among postbureaucratic reform theorists. She gives her own opinion on what forms the postbureaucratic state will take. Regardless of in the mode of Reinvented Public Sector, Government by Network, or Government by Market, the postbureaucratic principles she advocates are customer-driven, value-focused, entrepreneurial and market-oriented. Meanwhile, she pays special attention to democratic accountability. "...[T]he postbureaucratic state will be judged not only by its performance but by the degree to which it allows citizens to hold it accountable for its actions" (p. 25). She regards the accountability culture of traditional bureaucracy a big advantage over its successors.

And the new forms of policy implementation in the postbureaucratic state will "change the definition of transparency, generate new accountability mechanisms and sometimes requires a trade-off between innovation and accountability" (p. 25). Thus, Kamarck sets forth a question: will the postbureaucratic state serve democratic ideals more effectively than did the bureaucratic state of the previous century? After examining accountability issues in each of the three modes practiced in the Clinton/Gore administration, she gives the answer: an accountability system built on rules and regulations in bureaucracy will be replaced with an accountability system based on performance in the postbureaucratic state. This profound thought shows the readers

"Today's government leaders face an unprecedented number of options in policy implementation. They are responsible for matching policy goals with the appropriate implementation mode, and holding these new forms of government accountable for its citizens. Thus, talented and highly skilled government executives are seriously required in the future."

possibility and provides a way to rebuild the government accountability system in the new age with quickly evolving demands by citizens of their governments.

Another strength of Kamarck's arguments is her concern about the leadership of government in the new century. How will leadership be redefined in these new circumstances? Although she doesn't directly discuss "leadership" until the concluding chapter, it is a critical issue she regards for effective governance in the postbureaucratic state. Today's government leaders face an unprecedented number of options in policy implementation. They are responsible for matching policy goals with the appropriate implementation mode, and holding these new forms of government accountable for its citizens. Thus, talented and highly skilled government executives are seriously required in the future.

While discussing the postbureaucratic state, Kamarck fails to address certain issues. It seems that she has unfolded a grand picture of the postbureaucratic state, but never gives detailed instructions for governments to pick a particular way

to go. Kamarck mentions the flaws of these new modes several times in the book. “Each one is open to great creativity and innovation and susceptible to great cheating and stealing from the public purse” (p. 42). She concludes that, “Reinvented government can be costly as the old government it is trying to dress up” (p. 143). To be specific, she argued that “Government by network” can cause serious contracting deadlocks and millions of wasted dollars if it is managed improperly or the political controls for the accountabilities of organizations in the network are lacking; “Government by market” can be the source of many unexpected consequences if the market is not correctly designed and enforced (p.143). However, despite identify these flaws, she doesn’t give any remedies for these flaws. If new modes with postbureaucratic principles are solutions for problems caused by bureaucratic system, what are the political, legislative or economic remedies for the inherent flaws of these new modes? This, in fact, is a major challenge faced by today’s public leaders in establishing the postbureaucratic systems.

In examining the applicability of the new modes, she shows how they allow us to deal with a complex problem in a comprehensive and appropriate way in welfare dependence and homeland security. However, will they work in all the other policy arenas besides those two? It is not difficult to find the limitations of each mode. For instance, government by market works only when there is a true consensus on the outcomes of the policy. The consensus is the very premise for the performance measurement of the market approaches of government reforms. For the sake of these limitations, the applicability of these new modes deserves further study. With the improvement of theory and evolution of technology, those modes could be improved and become more applicable to the reality.

Another problem with her argument is that Kamarck creates a column “Accountability versus Innovation” in the matrix of “Accountability and Leadership” for each mode (p. 28, 34, 39). But is accountability the opposite of innovation? She fails to give a clear explanation. The complexity of modern policy challenges innovations in government. Meanwhile, government is confronted with more threats to its accountability while continuing to drive innovations in the way of policy implementation. But this doesn’t mean there is a negative relationship between accountability and innovation. Taking oversight of innovation and keeping it in the box of accountability undoubtedly is another challenge for public leaders in the postbureaucratic state.

Overall, Kamarck’s study is an attempt to describe the emerging policy implementation strategies of government in the 21st century. She emphasizes the crucial importance of implementation for achieving results and makes clear that there are various solutions to problems compounded by bureaucratic quagmires left over from the last century. The postbureaucratic theory, which Kamarck stands for, may be a positive, practical, prescriptive, and innovative new paradigm

in public administration research and theory, but numerous practical and scientific challenges remain.

References

- Nagel, Jack H. (1997). Radically Reinventing Government: Editor’s Introduction. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 16, 349-356.
- Reagan, Ronald. (1981). *First Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981*. Retrieved from <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/reagan1.htm>