

The People Factor: Strengthening America by Investing in Public Service

Linda J. Bilmes, W. Scott Gould
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Linda J. Bilmes, W. Scott Gould : The People Factor: Strengthening America by Investing in Public Service before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The People Factor: Strengthening America by Investing in Public Service:

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now Deputy Secretary of the VA -- read this to get some insight on what he's thinking. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Much cogent material but the book suffers from "presentism" By Frank T. Manheim This book joins many others in reviewing the problems of U.S. federal agency operation. Though it contains useful original material, it seems to lack a solid base in historical scholarship, which the books by Paul C. Light and Berman et al (4th ed, 2013) have. Without understanding the cycles of human behavior that seem to be exhibited in federal governmental operational history, it is easy to get lost in complexity. A number of authors point to similarities in the current dysfunctions in government, ethical lapses, and role of money in politics to the Gilded Age after the Civil War. Private operators with friends in high places colluded with Congressional members; public and private corruption and veniality were rampant (recognize anything?). Fortunately, governmental operation was gradually corrected by reform. After an international search for effective systems of governmental service set in motion by President Rutherford B. Hayes the Pendleton Act of 1883 created a merit-based civil service system that brought in most federal employees by the end of the Theodore Roosevelt Administration (1909). But political influences came back after World War II - and were given a big push by President Carter's Service Reform Act of 1978. Bilmes and Gould's book seems to betray the authors' focus on recent decades when it says that concern about the failures in the federal government's operation is not new - and then refers to the past decade! It talks about the federal appointment system being 50 years old, and in another place, that it is based on models designed for the operation of large corporations. 50 years before 2008 would be 1968, when the U.S. system was still dominated by the Pendleton Act of 1883. The four pages of that Act, though modified by subsequent law, were hardly modeled after large corporations! On the contrary, they were rigorously designed to separate agency operation from corporate or political influence. The Pendleton Act's emphasis on merit and use of practical testing to measure fitness of candidates for government jobs was in operation when Rachel Carson scored first in her test in 1935 and was hired as the Fish and "Wildlife Survey's 2nd female biologist. We are very far from that standard and badly need a new reform movement, which Bilmes and Gould's fine-tuning cannot supply. The "business efficiency" orientation was brought in primarily by the massive changes of President Carter's Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 - creating a new Senior Executive Service that could be mobilized flexibly by presidents to implement their preferred policies - even if that went against Congressionally mandated responsibilities for federal agencies.

Successful businesses have spent the past two decades retooling and rethinking how to manage their people better. Most big companies that have survived and prospered in the 21st century view employees as a vital strategic asset. In comparison, the U.S. federal government is a Stone Age relic, with its top-down bureaucracy, stovepiping of labor and responsibilities, and lack of training and investment in its own public servants. The inevitable result is a government not keeping up with the complex demands placed on it. In *The People Factor*, Linda Bilmes and Scott Gould present a blueprint for reinvigorating the public sector in order to deliver results for America. Their premise is that the federal government can achieve the same gains as the best private sector and military organizations by managing its people better. Their new vision for public service is based on "The People Factor," a set of management tools drawn from best practices in successful companies, the military, and high-performing government agencies. Part One of *The People Factor* book shows why the U.S. personnel system needs reform, revealing the high price of inaction. Part Two lays out the specific steps that must be taken to achieve the necessary gains. Part Three focuses on how to implement the People Factor and make the authors' vision a reality. They argue that the next president needs to turn this issue into a top priority and use political capital to push reform. Highlights of the book include: bull; Extensive original survey research bull; Case studies from government and the military bull; Interviews with leading thinkers on strategic human capital bull; A number of specific proposed innovations bull; A detailed proposal for a nationwide effort to train and revitalize the public service

"4 out of 4 stars. Highly recommended reading, especially for policy makers." mdash; OhMyGov! About the Author Linda Bilmes is a lecturer in public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She has served as CFO and assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Commerce and as a management consultant with the Boston Consulting Group. Her work on the costs of the Iraq War (with Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz) and on veterans issues have received widespread national coverage. W. Scott Gould is vice president, public sector strategy and growth, at IBM Global Business Services. He has also served as CFO and assistant secretary for administration at the Department of Commerce. Gould is also a captain in the U.S. Navy Reserve (Ret.) and a former White House fellow.