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If We Can Put A Man On The Moon: Getting Big Things Done In Government



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Synopsis

The American people are frustrated with their government-dismayed by a series of high-profile failures (Iraq, Katrina, the financial meltdown) that seems to just keep getting longer. Yet our nation has a proud history of great achievements: victory in World War II, our national highway system, welfare reform, the moon landing.We need more successes like these to reclaim government's legacy of competence. In If We Can Put a Man on the Moon, William Eggers and John O'Leary explain how to do it. The key? Understand-and avoid-the common pitfalls that trip up public-sector leaders during the journey from idea to results.The authors identify pitfalls including:-The Partial Map Trap: Fumbling handoffs throughout project execution-The Tolstoy Syndrome: Seeing only the possibilities you want to see-Design-Free Design: Designing policies for passage through the legislature, not for implementation-The Overconfidence Trap: Creating unrealistic budgets and timelines-The Complacency Trap: Failing to recognize that a program needs changeAt a time of unprecedented challenges, this book, with its abundant examples and hands-on advice, is the essential guide to making our government work better. A must-read for every public official, this book will be of interest to anyone who cares about the future of democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1969 the Apollo launch gave the U.S. confidence that, if we could beat the Russians to the moon, surely we could solve more prosaic problems. But succeeding years have shown that not to be the

case. Recent examples of governmental bungles include the response to Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, Abu Ghraib, and the economic meltdown. Business consultants Eggers and OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary analyzed 75 case studies of major public initiatives, domestic and international, failures and successes, and looked for patterns and lessons. They identify Ã¢â ¬Å“seven deadly trapsÃ¢â ¬Â• that can undermine the best-intended projects: the Tolstoy syndrome of seeing only what you want to see in a problem; policy designed to pass through legislatures but not for implementation; overconfidence that results in unrealistic budgets and time lines; complacency that fails to recognize the need for change; and fumbling throughout the execution stage of the process. The authors detail each trap along with providing examples of where management concepts from the business world could have produced better results in the government sector. Public officials and ordinary citizens will appreciate this fresh look at government programs and policies. --Vanessa Bush

“Eggers and OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary may have created a new genre—the Government Policy Thriller. We couldnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t get enough of the stories—good policies gone bad, great ideas that flew off the rails, and, occasionally, the stunning triumph that gives us hope that we can get to the moon again.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Chip and Dan Heath, coauthors of Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die“A clear-eyed look at how to get the best out of our public institutions. Instead of easy answers, the authors offer practical suggestions for successful execution in a very challenging and complex environment. A must-read for political leaders.Ã¢â ¬Â• --Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson“As we sort out the cross-pressures in twenty-first-century government, this book is a useful and lively guide to how to make things work. Driven by practical cases and pragmatic lessons, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s an invaluable road map to the government of the future.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Donald F. Kettl, Dean, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland“If We Can Send a Man to the Moon is the rare book that made me both shake my head in disbelief and nod my head with possibility. Eggers and OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary offer a trenchant analysis of how good government intentions can go awry. But they also show how sharper thinking and keener attention to design can help governments at all levels serve citizens better. Pick up two copies—one to read yourself, the other to send to your favorite elected official.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Daniel H. Pink, author of A Whole New Mind“After serving as a mayor, a congressman for twenty years, and as a secretary of two cabinet-level departments in two administrations from different political parties, I can attest that the challenges of executing successful government programs exist at all levels of government, in all parties, and in all locations. Eggers and OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary present exactly the most common traps

that lead to a failure of execution, but more importantly they present ways to help avoid those traps. Their ideas should be presented to all government employees.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta

Examining dozens of case studies on large U.S. government projects, the authors illustrate the challenges faced by government decision-makers and agencies in policy formulation, implementation, and oversight, and the extraordinary difficulty in getting the incentives right in all of these phases. Speaking as someone who has spent the past quarter-century directly supporting federal agencies and studying their large-scale projects as an academic, I believe the authors have done a superb job of capturing the essential issues that can either enable or hinder success. And refreshingly, they do it in a balanced, non-partisan way.The only point that doesn't quite ring true is the authors' contention that program design should (and could) be addressed in more detail in the legislative drafting phase. The Congress doesn't have the time or expertise to do this in most cases. Aside from the highly visible issues that prompt 1200-page bills, the Congress often purposely leaves the details to the implementing agencies, for better or worse. The authors' suggestion that an independent "policy design review" by subject-matter experts be conducted in the legislative phase seems sensible at first, but raises many questions: Will there be time to fit this into the 2-year legislative cycle? How will the review be funded? Will partisans and interest groups be able to put undue influence on the selection of the study panel or the direction of its results?Despite this one criticism, this is an important book that provides an informative and thought-provoking read for students and professionals alike. Each of the chapters ends with a summary reminiscent of a textbook, but the book's style is far more compelling than any textbook I remember from my school days. The final chapter is especially noteworthy, powerfully ending the book with profiles of two individuals, one a political appointee and politician, and the other a career bureaucrat. The reader comes away with a heightened appreciation for the government's potential to accomplish great things. I hope this does get used as a textbook so more students will see the possibilities and be drawn to public service.

I must say that this new book - along with its very creative title - tops my favorite book list for public management! Indeed, "If We Can Put A Man on the Moon: Getting Big Things Done in Government" is a very well-researched, thought-provoking piece on how government can turn novel ideas into real results. The "seven deadly traps" framework that the authors innovatively develop and present resonates well with me. As a MPA graduate and public sector consultant by training, I truly

appreciate authors' new, refreshing ways to depict and analyze complicated issues and stimulate provocative ideas.In difficult times like this when great ideas ought to find their ways to effectively deliver desired results, this is a MUST-READ for those in the public sector leadership and management positions and others who are interested in civic leadership and making effective changes within government. It's time to leverage the cutting-edge ideas from the private sector and learn from the lessons of the ups-and-downs facing public sector initiatives so that government entities of all levels can become more efficient and effective.Eggers and O'Leary did a fantastic job in combining leading theories and best practices to present innovative yet pragmatic solutions unique to the specific challenges and issues facing government and their stakeholders. If you are short of time to read through the entire book - which is a great easy-read regardless, turn to the "Field Guide" pages of each chapter and you will find the sensible SOLUTIONS with all the manageable tools and techniques to work through your problems....A 5-star, highly recommended book for students who aspire to be effective public sector managers and leaders and those public sector veterans alike who strive to help make our world a better one for everyone!

Taking Project Apollo as its launching point, Eggers and O'Leary walk us through the steps required to get any ambitious project done in government. Along the way we learn that government has become less effective since the moon landing, according do those responsible for implementing policy--and most importantly, why.But rather than rail on what's wrong with the way things get done (or not) in government, the authors show us how to fix what's wrong. Rather than cast blame, they show us how all of us can pull together to get things done, from politicians and those responsible for implementing policy, right down to ordinary voters.Engaging, real-life examples of successes and failures, fascinating profiles of lesser-known yet highly influential personalities, and a down-to-earth and easy-to-read style make this a compelling read for anyone concerned about where our government is taking us today.-=Michael Belfiore, author ofÃ Â The Department of Mad Scientists: How DARPA Is Remaking Our World, from the Internet to Artificial Limbs

So many management books rely on academic studies which, to say the least, are boring.This book takes the case-study approach. The topics discussed are easily relatable to projects the reader may have already finished or is in in the middle of. Highly recommended for somebody looking for fresh perspective (and not a textbook.)

I am a retired civil servant who worked in some capacities on several of the large issues covered in

the book in a mid management, analyst role. I found the history and lessons learned were spot on. I highly recommend it to those who don't want to repeat some of the failures of the past. It is also an enjoyable experience.

Excellent reading for those in government and those considering government as a career.

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