

Book review

Political Management. The Dance of Government and Politics.

By Jennifer Lees-Marshment, 2021. 244 pages. Paperback. £34.99. ISBN: 9780367467043

In this book, Jennifer Lees-Marshment provides a pioneering and innovative exploration into the sparsely populated literature of political management, effectively constructing “the first conceptual architecture for the emerging field of political management” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 239). Despite the array of previous work ostensibly examining political management, it is argued that the rigour and depth of this research and its subsequent teaching is limited, inherently justifying a comprehensive study to develop this largely unacknowledged phenomenon.

The book begins with the author justifying the importance and nature of political management, outlining the pragmatist and multi-method methodology of the work, and discerning that, due to the lack of research defining political management, the book will pioneeringly question “what is political management? What does it involve?” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 11). Subsequently, the opening chapter rightly discusses justifications for the work and presents the theory-building nature of this seminal study that is underpinned by empirical illustrations through political documents and high-profile practitioner perspectives on political management from across differing socio-political and geographical contexts, both in the national and the devolved political spheres.

In-line with the theory-building scope of the book, Lees-Marshment (2021) discerns that there are five core areas of political management:

- 1) Political planning
- 2) Political organising
- 3) Political HR
- 4) Political leadership
- 5) Political reviewing

Each of these facets are examined through astutely written chapters examining sub-sections of each facet of political management, such as the importance of understanding the mission being the first area of political planning, before then setting a vision statement for what an organisation wants to achieve (Lees-Marshment, 2021). Each chapter is buttressed by case-led analysis to situate areas of political management in relation to empirical examples, alongside appropriating invaluable excerpts from high-profile practitioners such as the Chief of Staff to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. These cases accentuate the real-life importance of political management and, by situating each facet of political management in relation to real-life events, they situate how different methods of political management have succeeded or failed following different implementations.

Following chapters on the five core areas of political management, the final chapter facilitates a synthesis of these ideas to create a pioneering model of ‘the four Ds’ of political management.’ These ‘four Ds’ weave in facets of political management discussed in previous chapters and accentuate the cardinal areas of political management proposed for further research:

- 1) Deliberating: “Deliberating, at heart, is about thinking – an underdone activity in the high speed game of politics and government, but no less essential...Deliberating should be completed before designing, doing and dancing” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 209)
- 2) Designing: “Designing is about planning what to do, using information and understanding from deliberating to create strategic goals and plans” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 215).
- 3) Doing: “Doing is the most standard part of political management and is about implementation and managing the people involved” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 223).
- 4) Dancing: “Dancing is the more nebulous yet tremendously powerful aspect of political management which involves using tactical, artful and adaptive power sources and leadership approaches that are not always clearly defined or official” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 229).

Through formulating the ‘four Ds’ model, Lees-Marshment (2021) effectively constructs a rigorous starting point for a future political management research agenda, and effectively highlights research gaps in political management, with practitioners almost unanimously asserting that political HR is a largely neglected area that requires serious attention. Indeed, Lees-Marshment (2021) asserts that, as a seminal text, the ‘four Ds’ model will be open to critique and development in the future. However, as a starting point, this model represents a welcome inception for future political management research: an extremely important field of research that will provide essential insights for scholars and practitioners of political management alike.

Over the book’s 7 chapters, important questions across politics, political communication, political strategy and management are raised that further understanding into political management, offering an in-depth and much required contribution to the dearth of political management research. By utilising theory-building research supplemented by high-level practitioner insights from a wide-variety of differing socio-political and geographical contexts such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, the author situates the importance and utilisation of political management internationally, making claims as to why political management should be taught and researched further.

The preliminary strength of this text is its excellent readability and appropriation of case-studies and practitioner insights, situating the relevance of political management in the real world. Through doing this, this book will be useful not only for students of political management, but also for practitioners who require an insight into conducting effective political management, with the book written almost didactically to aid practitioners in developing political management within organisations. Yet, whilst undoubtedly a seminal text for political management, the book does have limitations which are understood by the author, such as the acceptance that “the four Ds of political management will...be critiqued, adjusted and adapted over time” (Lees-Marshment, 2021, p. 235). Given the dearth of political management literature, this is unavoidable and will likely contribute towards necessary debate surrounding how political management can be better understood and practiced. Yet, the ‘four Ds’ are an excellent start to this debate.

However, one unacknowledged weakness is that, despite Lees-Marshment (2021) appropriating a plethora of practitioner insights and examples of political management across

continents, the book does not consider political management in authoritarian, pseudo-democratic or transitioning democratic contexts. Future work on political management could examine how modifying political management in transitioning democracies may aid governments towards achieving democratic goals and ridding of ingrained authoritarian cultures within governmental political management which require amelioration to successfully aid in democratic transition.

However, as Lees-Marshment (2021) clearly states at the outset: “this is the first book to explain what political management is, what activities it involves, and why it is important...it aims to facilitate future empirical research in political management” (p. 1). Future research considering political management in a wide variety of contexts will likely ensue, and as such, this is an excellent seminal text that will be essential reading for students of politics and political management, but also practitioners. Concisely and clearly written, important topics are addressed in what is an excellent pioneering text on the under-studied field of political management.

References:

Lees-Marshment, J. (2021). *Political Management The Dance of Government and Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge.