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Transforming the Character of Public Organizations: Techniques for Change Agents

A. Carol Rusaw

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From her own experience in various agencies and organizations, Dr. Rusaw knows that to inspire change in any organization and particularly in the public sector, change agents must understand that change is primarily collective, nonrational, and nonlinear. People who seek to create change cannot stand apart from the problems, issues, and concerns raised by their constituents, but must merge themselves into the data-making, analysis, and diagnosis phases of consulting. The agent must, in other words, participate actively in creating change?and how the agent must do this, why, and the effects the agent can expect are the subjects of Dr. Rusaw's book. Few books discuss public sector change in the way Dr. Rusaw does here, and none incorporate the phenomenological perspective that she uses. Her book will appeal to practicing public administrators who seek real-life examples presented in conversational language. It will also be important for teachers and students in public administration, specifically in courses in organizational behavior, leadership, organization theory, human relations, and public personnel management.

Not only can change agents help public employees serve the purposes set out for them more effectively and efficiently, but by service and other efforts they can also help reverse the downward trend that has characterized the public sector in recent years. Dr. Rusaw maintains that such change is made possible by personal transformation, certainly, but also by interpersonal transformations. By focusing on individual and group needs as keys to organizational change, change agents can facilitate what is most needed: not just localized alterations but widespread, holistic transformations. Her book looks at the role of healing?particularly, the inherent skills of listening, empathizing, and encouraging?and at the ways in which people can confront and solve problems in negotiated environments. She also sees that central to re-education and re-socialization is the quality of the change agent's inner person: how well the agent is able to understand the role of self in the change process. Her book provides ways in which agents can inspire others to change too. In other words, Dr. Rusaw sees organizational change as a process moving from the inside to the outside, and it is on this foundation that her unusual, thoughtful, and ultimately practical book is based.

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