

Preface

Government today is akin to an experienced sailing crew facing uncharted and volatile waters: the accumulated skills and wisdom are enough to stay afloat, but the strain and leaks are spreading. As Norah Jones sings, “With a captain who’s too proud to say, that he dropped the oar...we’re gonna be sinkin’ soon.”

Perhaps not sinking, but in many countries the ship that is government requires refurbishment: suspicion and cynicism are on the rise both within and on the outside as more and more question the resilience and performance of its present incarnation. In short, the sturdy machinery of government stemming from pre-digital and highly autocratic and often aristocratic eras—with scarcity of education and information the norm—is poorly suited to contemporary realities and the still-nascent but ever more visible and influential era of mobility.

As this book neared completion over the summer of 2012, three sets of diverging forces are illustrative of what drives this particular undertaking—and the nature of the challenges presenting themselves.

First, within Dalhousie University’s blended learning MPA (M) Program, an online dialogue with current public servants explored the tension between traditional Westminster government principles and practices and the emergence of so-called Government 2.0 (as discussed below, closely related to Web 2.0 and the advent of mobility). Working collaboratively and virtually, students prepared prototypes of new governance models crafted upon a Gov 2.0 mindset, many utilizing social media and wikis for the first time. In highly focused policy and service realms, the projects demonstrated the collective potential of a more outward and agile public sector no longer seeking control but instead opportunities to listen, learn, and act in concert with others.

Along with this considerable promise nonetheless came the cold shower of the final exam. Asked to examine the systemic barriers to the embracement of what some researchers have termed “ubiquitous engagement” (Lee and Kwak 2011), students dissected the command and control political architecture democratically and its close bureaucratic cousin administratively. The broad lesson learned is as follows: the space in between tradition and structures of the past—and the potentials

of tomorrow—remains vast. This book seeks to dissect and explain this space and its repercussions for the public sector in terms of both management and democracy.

Secondly—and from outside of government—stories abound with regard to how mobile technologies and the proliferation of smartphones are fundamentally altering the way we live and behave. Some are wildly enthusiastic in embracing such change; others have growing doubts as to what may be lost. For example, in late July of 2012 New York Times technology writer, David Pogue, lost his iPhone and in an effort to locate it proceeded to leverage the collective engagement of nearly 1.4 million Twitter followers—as well as the digital tracking functionality of the device itself (the Find My iPhone app that uses GPS signalling). Acting on numerous tips and the social media frenzy that ensued, a police officer retrieved it from a New Jersey backyard (Pogue 2012).

When asked about the privacy implications of such digital footprints, Pogue replied with indifference, arguing that sacrificing privacy is a modest, reasonable price for the gains of digital life. He pointed to credit card transactions, telephone surveillance, and public and industry data mining as the new norms of being on the grid—with the considerable benefits of convenience and innovation (and we can add, collective action) resulting. In short, Pogue pointed out that in today's digital world, there really is no disconnecting from such ubiquity, so why not embrace it?

Why not indeed? Yet just a few days later, a very different perspective from a Washington Post writer featuring a tech savvy individual's decision to retreat from the digital fast lane of Silicon Valley into a small town setting—and a primarily offline life (Timberg 2012). Seeking calmer, quieter surroundings for creativity and more traditional and meaningful forms of community engagement, a former Facebook user and employee, Katherine Losse, touched a nerve for many in conveying a sense of disquiet and anxiety that many experience in today's world, but few are able or willing to articulate, even as this movement is growing (Losse 2012).

Whether innovation is driven by solitude or incessant socialization as well as impacts from an online world blending personal and professional spheres to an unprecedented degree is central to an evolving workplace and demographic cleavages shaping it. Such matters, in short, are central to mobility and the present quest for Government 2.0.

Thirdly, while the trials and tribulations of Facebook and Research in Motion captured many business headlines in 2012, the main battle in the technology world was playing out in court rooms and retail stores around the world—namely, the intensifying rivalry between Apple and Android as the operating system of choice for smartphones and tablets. The most visible legal dispute stemming from this battle has featured patent infringement disputes between Apple and Samsung (the latter the most prominent Android user in its smartphone and tablet devices). Apple would win the August 2012 ruling; Samsung immediately appealed and days later also won a separate ruling in Japan.

For the public sector, this epic clash of technology titans encapsulates upheaval in traditional procurement and IT management models due to the advent of cloud computing, social media, and smart devices. Along with shifting notions of

ownership in terms of infrastructure, governments have been quick to embrace “open data” and the development of “apps” as a means of collective, 2.0-stylized forms of engagement. The somewhat analogous clashes between proprietary and open source technologically, and information control and genuine openness politically and administratively, are central to widening schisms between machinery and mobility visions of the public sector uncomfortably coexisting at present.

In dissecting these and other tensions, a strong case emerges for a holistic reconfiguration of democratic and administrative governance. The aim of this book project is less fundamental resolution of such complex terrain and more providing (1) some informed guidance as to the sorts of choices and challenges that must be met, (2) a critical assessment of government efforts thus far, and (3) some insights and lessons as to how creative and collective adaptation can best be nurtured and leveraged as digital life expands. This book similarly serves as a platform for post-secondary students of government in moving beyond traditional notions of *machinery of government* and devising—collectively and creatively—new models of more open and participative governance premised upon *mobility*. The contrasts and cleavage between machinery and mobility are central to contemporary public sector life. This book, then, seeks a basis for charting swirling and unknown waters.

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Halifax, NS, Canada

Jeffrey Roy



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Roy, J.

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