

Revista de Administración Pública



Salvador Parrado Díez **Guide to Make Improvement Plans in the Public** **Administrations**

Salvador Parrado Díez, *Guía para la elaboración de planes de mejora en las administraciones públicas*, Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública, Madrid, 2005, pp. 176.

The first attraction of this guide is the recommendations the author makes—even before the introduction- in the brief section “How to read this book”. In this section, he relates why the different chapters exist, their contents and their usefulness. They are useful for many readers, depending on their functions and their professions.

It is refreshing to read a book in which the author has a lot of experience to tell us that his book is not completely indispensable for everybody and that it is not complete neither in the subject at hand nor for the objective public. In the introduction, the author states “Every book defines itself for what it is and for what it is not, for what it has been made and for what and for whom it has been published”.

The author conceives this guideline as a guide for political executives. It is to be used to organize, in one document, “the tools normally used to persuade those, who control resources.” It tells them that their ideas are worthwhile and he focuses on “how to make an improvement plan in one document”.

It discourages those from searching for techniques in thoroughness on data gathering, searching for techniques in placing values and analyzing information, searching for techniques in taking decisions or searching for techniques for proposing evaluations.

The guide is made so that it can be used adequately in a reality in which the ideal world of rational models is continuously assaulted by the intrusion of politics. That is why the reader is expected to identify his particular conditions, looking for his unique definitions.

The first part of this guideline deals with how to establish the improvement plan in a political conception of organizations. In this part,

the author insists strongly, on the importance of identifying public servants as well as identifying the results and impacts, not exclusively on resources and activities. This is a key point in which we face the ones who work in the public sector, *urbi et orbi*.

The second part deals with the essential parts of the improvement plan. The parts are: the format, the stages, and the components to make the document and the way to obtain a product to reinforce an argument. The appendix gives real cases either of public national policies or local corporations.

To start with, in the first part of the guide, one can see the work in making the plan work, or better yet, the didactic achievement. Years of experience are perceived in his writings. First the author shows different interpretations or models of changes in organizations, and then he shows the relationships between goals, problems, solutions and improvement plans.

Also, he shows the difficulties in identifying the problems organizations must solve. He uses complex examples to state the problem and to design indicators that limit their fields of application.

He also warns us about the supposedly impartiality of numbers: "The interpretations that numbers give depends on how they are used and on how they are used in an argument". This phrase did not fall on deaf ears, because when I read it, I remembered multiple occasions in which I have "interpreted" figures to reinforce a position.

Also, he gives us an interesting presentation on what to look for when you want to identify the causes of the situations or problems. The world is divided between the privileged ones that caused the problem, the ones who want to know who is responsible for the problem, the ones who interpret the cause as an assumed risk, etc.

These possibilities are presented with the objective of showing how arguments are constructed to reinforce positions, taking into consideration the interests, the power of relationships and the people who make the decisions.

When considering the solutions, the guideline again sets itself apart from "purity" or theoretical rigidity. It postulates that there are never solutions in the market exclusively, but communitarian or purely from the state. The solutions come from the combination of different interests and there are no optimal solutions.

Another important aspect of the guideline is the attention call about the interrelationships among resources, activities, products and impacts in the cycle of politics and the public administration and the role and the modality of their evaluation.

The last three chapters (diagnosis, the improvement plan, and the document) are essential and practical: the author leads us through

the process and he takes us step by step through the necessary activities and the indispensable components of an improvement plan, including formats. Each of them is properly exemplified and supported. For instance: When and why is it preferable to use a bar graph and not a linear graph? What should the introduction include in the improvement plan? How to write the bibliography?

The appendix allows us to have a real reference of improvement plans and evaluation plans that can lead us to making our own plans.

The conclusion is that this guideline should be a “bible” for all those who make an improvement plan. Considering its recommendations guarantees the identification of the problem, the inclusion of the fundamental aspects to consider and the clearness of the steps to follow.

On the other hand, showing the complexity of the environment of the public policies, showing the lack of stiffness in the consideration of the problems and stating for a fact that there is “a” solution, makes this an extraordinary book for those who are in charge of the improvement of the public administration.

Isabel Siklodi Pérez