



Systems Thinking in the Public Sector: The Failure of the Reform Regime... and a Manifesto for a Better Way

John Seddon

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The free market has become the accepted model for the public sector. Politicians on all sides compete to spread the gospel. And so, in the UK and elsewhere, there's been massive investment in public sector 'improvement', 'customer choice' has been increased and new targets have been set and refined. But our experience is that things haven't changed much. This is because governments have invested in the wrong things. Belief in targets, incentives and inspection; belief in economies of scale and shared back-office services; belief in 'deliverology... these are all wrong-headed ideas and yet they have underpinned this government's attempts to reform the public sector. John Seddon here dissects the changes that have been made in a range of services, including housing benefits, social care and policing. His descriptions beggar belief, though they would be funnier if it wasn't our money that was being wasted. In place of the current mess, he advocates a Systems Thinking approach where individuals come first, waste is reduced and responsibility replaces blame. It's an approach that is proven, successful and relatively cheap - and one that governments around the world, and their advisers, need to adopt urgently. "A refreshing deconstruction of the control freakery of the current performance regime. It could do for thinking on business improvement what An Inconvenient Truth has done for climate change." Andrew Grant, Chief Executive, Aylesbury Vale District Council "This is the must-have book. It correctly identifies why the present regime is failing our citizens and customers, but more importantly it gives the reader a proven method by which to bring about real improvement in service performance and cost." Dr Carlton Brand, Director of Resources, Wiltshire County Council "This book is uncomfortable, challenging and very direct. It offers huge learning and insight... A superb read." David McQuade, Deputy Chief Executive, Flagship Housing Group "If ministers, local authority leaders and chief executives only read one book this year this is it. A true beacon of sanity in an increasingly insane regime; ministers should read this and recognise the error of their ways." Mark Radford, Director of Corporate Services, Swale District Council

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