



Agendas and Decisions: How State Government Executives and Middle Managers Make and Administer Policy

Dorothy F. Olshfski, Robert B. Cunningham

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Studies how state-level public executives and managers in Tennessee decide and implement policy.

Connecting theory and practice, *Agendas and Decisions* explores how state-level public executives and managers decide and implement policy. The authors focus on Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander's (1979–1987) management system, which believed in and practiced the principles espoused by leadership theorists: focus on one or two important substantive problems or initiatives, work with stakeholders to protect the organization and to obtain necessary resources, hire good people, and authorize them to act. In addition to sending his cabinet members to the Kennedy School of Government to learn leadership principles, he also established the Tennessee Government Executive Institute (TGEI) to provide a similar program for mid-level executives. Authors Dorothy F. Olshfski and Robert B. Cunningham managed the TGEI during its first five years and had unprecedented access to state-level public executives and managers. Here, they explain the everyday workings of state-level bureaucracy within the context of a simple decision model and share managers' and executives' own stories. Their research questions several aspects of the current orthodoxy on decision-making processes, offers new thinking about executive leadership in implementation and evaluation, and compares executive and middle-manager thinking and behavior.

“As Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander subscribed to mainstream advice to managers: ‘hire good people, give them authority to make decisions, get them the resources they need, leave them alone, support and protect them, and, if they make too many mistakes, remove them.’ This volume illustrates how this simple advice can be complicated in practice. Following the Decision Process Model, Olshfski and Cunningham analyze how Alexander's appointees met with success or failure in a complicated real world ... a must-read for practitioners and scholars.” — *CHOICE*

“This book merits commendations and attention from multiple standpoints ... It is an exceptional single-state case study providing insight about a strategic approach to administering a state's policies and programs. It reflects a coherent, concerted, and conscious effort to place a meaningful theoretical template on public administration and policy processes.” — *The American Review of Politics*

“There are several things to like about this book: the blending of theory and practice, the grounded theory approach where theory is derived from the stories of the executives and administrators, and the way it brings public policy alive and makes it real for public managers. Like some other great texts, the authors theorize about public management based upon what it is public managers say they do. This is very important, as is making the links between management and policy.” — Cheryl Simrell King, coauthor of *Transformational Public Service: Portraits of Theory in Practice*



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