

# Book Review

Review of Public Personnel Administration  
2016, Vol. 36(2) 210–213  
© The Author(s) 2016  
Reprints and permissions:  
[sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav)  
[rop.sagepub.com](http://rop.sagepub.com)



Voelz, G. J. (2010). *Contractors in the Government Workplace: Managing the Blended Workforce*. Lanham, MD: Government Institutes. 171 pp. ISBN: 9781605906980.

**Reviewed by:** Heather Getha-Taylor, *University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA*  
DOI: 10.1177/0734371X16631045

In *Contractors in the Government Workplace: Managing the Blended Workforce*, Glenn Voelz traces the growth of contracting and effectively argues for government supervisors to understand the rules, expectations, and boundaries of managing the government–contractor relationship. The challenges for managing this dynamic are many and start with the fact that the public sector’s acquisition workforce is thin and has not kept pace with massive expansion of contracting in recent years. Voelz’s contribution is a valued one in this environment. Current and future managers need to be familiar with the basics of contract administration and understand how best to build contractor relationships while protecting legal and ethical priorities.

Voelz’s book draws upon primary and secondary data collected via seminars, interviews, regulations, other published documents, and personal experience to present practitioners with a useful guide for understanding the scope and complexity of the government–contractor relationship. Voelz is careful to note both the strengths and the limitations of the book. Although the text is intended to provide a basic understanding of “tools, techniques, rules, and regulations relating to the supervision of contractors in the workplace,” it is not intended as a substitute for formal training that would allow someone to “write contracts or make obligations on behalf of the government” (p. 4). Nor does it offer theoretical foundations or empirical research results. Rather, this practical resource provides general context and broad recommendations.

To begin, Chapter 1 offers some striking facts about the rise of contracting. Voelz notes that the U.S. federal government is the single largest buyer of commercial services in the world and that government purchasing increased by nearly 75% between 2000 and 2005 (p. 1). The challenges associated with navigating this uncharted territory are apparent: Managing contracts has been identified as a high-risk area by the U.S. Government Accountability Office due to vulnerability to fraud, waste, and misuse of taxpayer dollars. These risks are compounded by insufficient capacity to oversee the contractor workforce. Yet, the reliance on contractors to perform core mission functions previously carried out by government personnel demands careful attention. Given this new reality, “all government employees and supervisors must understand

contract-administration best practices and be familiar with rules and regulations governing the conduct of contractors in the workplace” (p. 3).

Chapter 2 of the book provides a thorough overview of contracting terms and types as well as the government-contracting process. Furthermore, this chapter includes an overview of contracting guidelines and regulations, including those found in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and Office of Management and Budget’s Revised Circular A-76. This chapter also includes an overview of the role of the government supervisor in managing the government–contractor relationship. The ideal relationship is marked by interdependence and close involvement throughout the contracting process. It is this close partnership, says Voelz, that “is critical for ensuring that the service contract is administered in a manner that is legal, ethical, and efficient and that adheres to all applicable regulations” (p. 25). Chapter 3 considers the “roles, responsibilities, and authorities” of the members of the government–contractor team. The chapter includes overviews of requirements, duties, and interactions. The information presented in this chapter speaks to emerging skill sets needed by government employees today and in the future, including conflict management, work flow planning, data analysis, and written/oral communication. Furthermore, it is clear from this chapter that government employees must be the guardians of the public interest: They must be able to identify any legal or ethical issues that arise in the contracting relationship.

Chapter 4 presents the complexity of managing the blended government–contractor workforce, which is marked by “little distinction in the nature and conditions of work they perform, yet there are critical distinctions between them that must be recognized and respected” (p. 51). The paradox of managing the government–contractor relationship is clear. Contractors and government employees operate separately, but are mutually dependent on one another: “the success or failure of the program depends on a team approach whereby all members take responsibility for ensuring that the contractor delivers the required product or service to standard” (p. 55). Chapter 5 presents tips for government supervisors in “taking charge of the blended workforce” (p. 61). This is a tall order indeed, especially given the introduction to this chapter, which notes, “Unlike a leader’s normal obligations to a government team, supervisors have no direct responsibility for, authority over, or accountability to contractor employees” (p. 61). This new reality has implications for the understanding and practice of leadership in the blended workplace.

Chapter 6 addresses the myriad of ethical, legal, and security concerns associated with managing a blended workforce. For instance, as mentioned above, those who supervise contractors are responsible for establishing an ethical climate (p. 83). It is expected that government employees and contractors alike will participate in ethics training, but it is difficult to imagine what this might look like, given the differing guidelines related to Hatch Act provisions, as well as those related to equal opportunity, sexual harassment, or drug/alcohol abuse (p. 84). Chapter 7 of the text presents “Supervisor Best Practices,” and again highlights the importance of training “to educate government employees on their responsibilities and implementing necessary safeguards in the workplace” (p. 93). This chapter lists some of the most common

contracting management problems that arise from “basic misperceptions concerning appropriate roles, responsibilities of government versus contractor personnel” (p. 94). This chapter provides a robust treatment of “inherently governmental functions,” which is important as government and contract employees often work side-by-side on “nearly indistinguishable” tasks (p. 101).

The final chapter, Chapter 8, centers on evaluating contractor performance, including key measures of interest: economy, efficiency, and effectiveness (p. 109). Voelz also identifies a number of contractor “intangibles” that matter, including honesty and integrity, promptness, accuracy, timeliness, positive attitude, professionalism, and attention to detail. Voelz provides some valuable guidance on establishing a performance assessment system to measure these items of interest, but questions remain related to management capacity, metrics identification, and effective implementation of a performance management system. Appendices A to D provide key terms, checklists, and tips for writing-related documents. Appendix E considers the special considerations for “contingency” contracting in such scenarios as the Hurricane Katrina recovery, and Appendix F provides recommendations for contract support in “austere” environments. These are important topics, and it is regrettable that they are not covered in greater detail. Furthermore, the book would be strengthened overall with additional examples to help familiarize the inexperienced reader. Unfortunately, the book concludes without a closing chapter to integrate lessons and identify next steps. To this end, the following points are offered to supplement the text, highlight themes of interest, and present unanswered questions.

1. The need for human resource management in the blended workforce

Throughout the text, Voelz repeatedly identifies responsibilities and tasks that require the input of human resource managers. For instance, the need to train both contractors and government managers is within the purview of the human capital office. However, Durant, Girth, and Johnston (2009) note that outsourcing human resources is happening rapidly and with great impact, particularly as it relates to the ability to respond to contract management needs (p. 221). Furthermore, Voelz highlights the importance of having a trusted legal and ethical official available to provide advice on murky contracting issues. While this need is clear, the path ahead is not, especially as Battaglio and Ledvinka (2009) note deficiencies in this respect due to HR outsourcing. Together, these trends beg the following question: How can we continue to outsource human resources functions and effectively retain capacity to ensure responsible contract management?

2. Remembering the public dimension of public service delivery

Voelz’s book clearly identifies government employees as those responsible for protecting the public interest. This is achieved through protecting secure information, identifying legal violations, and cultivating an ethical climate. The underlying public values, however, should be important to both government and contractors alike

as public dollars support the work of both groups (see Coggburn, 2007). It is important to note, however, that government employees cannot assume that contractors receive training or socialization related to value-laden topics such as security standards, use of government resources, legal/ethical guidelines, or public accountability. This final topic should be considered explicitly, especially in contexts where capacity for oversight is constrained (Johnston & Romzek, 1999; Kettl, 2000). Accountability is critical for preserving the public trust and ensuring continued joint stewardship of public resources.

### 3. The leadership challenge in managing the not-so-blended workforce

Bradbury and Waechter (2009) note that contracting out “poses a fundamental challenge to the competencies and capacities of public managers” (p. 246). Voelz’s work echoes that statement in presenting the stark differences between contract and government employees, including divides related to “virtually every aspect of employment,” including “entitlements, duties, and expectations” (p. 51). For instance, while government employees are held to civil service rules, regulations, and codes of conduct, the same cannot be said for their contractor counterparts. Furthermore, motivations may contrast drastically. While public employees are expected to act in the public interest, contractors have obligations to shareholders and private profit (p. 51). Despite these differences, public managers must find ways to bridge the divides and ensure that both groups work together to fulfill contracts and deliver public services. “It is important to remember,” says Voelz, “that ultimately the success or failure of the government–contractor relationship depends on a collaborative effort” (p. 46). And the role of public leaders in that process cannot be understated: “Even the best-written contract will only be as good as the quality of their administration and oversight” (p. 54).

## References

- Battaglio, R. P., & Ledvinka, C. B. (2009). Privatizing human resources in the public sector: Legal challenges to outsourcing the human resource function. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 29*, 293-307.
- Bradbury, M. D., & Waechter, G. D. (2009). Extreme outsourcing in local government: At the top and all but the top. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 29*, 230-248.
- Coggburn, J. D. (2007). Outsourcing human resources: The case of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 27*, 315-335.
- Durant, R. F., Girth, A. M., & Johnston, J. M. (2009). American exceptionalism, human resource management, and the contract state. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 29*, 207-229.
- Johnston, J. M., & Romzek, B. S. (1999). Contracting and accountability in state Medicaid reform: Rhetoric, theories, and reality. *Public Administration Review, 59*, 383-399.
- Kettl, D. F. (2000). The transformation of governance: Globalization, devolution, and the role of government. *Public administration review, 60*, 488-497.