

Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., AIA

My thanks to Joe Whitefield, executive director, facilities services at Middle Tennessee State University, for his book review contribution. This column encourages the reading of good books and sharing of thoughts. As your summer progresses, pick up one or both of these books to prepare yourself for the restart of the academic year.

PREDICTING OUTCOMES OF INVESTMENTS IN MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR OF FEDERAL FACILITIES

National Research Council, The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C., 2012, 108 pages, softcover, \$36.

The federal government is the largest property owner/user in the nation, and has a wide variety of facilities. There is an advantage at looking at what the federal government does with various parts of facility management as it applies to higher education, because there are many comparable facilities in the federal portfolio to higher education. So, when I saw the announcement of the pending publication of this book last fall, I ordered it.



This is not an easy read but it's not overly technical—unless you dig into Appendix C. The committee gathered to write this book was impressive: a veritable “who’s who” in federal facilities management. The data they had access to, and the outcome of their work encapsulated in the book, is impressive and dense. But it is impressive in its clarity and thoroughness on the subject.

The book is well organized, beginning with an executive summary that outlines the approach used to assess the data from all reporting federal facility groups, and a review of the findings and

recommendations resulting from the report. My initial thought when reading the recommendations was that the report would not be very helpful; many of the recommendations are things that APPA leaders, authors, and members have discussed for years. But, as I read further, the report became more and more impressive.

Once again, this is not an easy read. There is a lot of information packed into a little over 100 pages. There are issues of strategic importance, such as what data to collect and how often to collect or analyze it. There is extensive discussion about assessing facility risks compared to an organizational mission. Sadly, the contents of an analytical “black box” some agencies use to assess facility needs is not revealed. It's often helpful to see what one organization views as its ideal decision-making tool. I found their access to some private facility operations and the tools they used to be particularly informative and helpful. Most important, but difficult for higher education, is the removal of facilities from the portfolio when they lose productivity or don't serve the organizational mission.

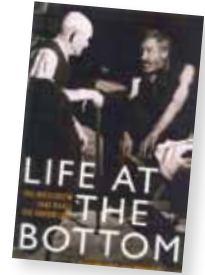
The topic of communication about facility issues has its own chapter, of course. If there's one thing a facility officer understands, it's that frequent and varied communication is essential for customer satisfaction.

This is an excellent reference for senior facility officers; it outlines a set of principles to implement and follow for any large organization. There are references to various reports or tools that can be tested or used to help with facility decisions. And while I don't think the title is fully realized by the text, it will be on my reference shelf and I expect it will be used heavily over the coming years to help address my facility needs.

-TW

LIFE AT THE BOTTOM: THE WORLDVIEW THAT MAKES THE UNDERCLASS

Theodore Dalrymple, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2001, 288 pages, softcover, \$16.95.



A common theme heard today across many communities, including university and college campuses, is the need to “change the culture.” Whether it involves students, employees, or others, this is actually quite difficult and often sets up a clash between those who desire change and those whose behaviors are targeted for change. Focusing on an especially troubled segment of British society, *Life at the Bottom* explores the many facets of this endeavor. It takes a deep look into the paradigms that shape the thoughts and feed the behaviors and decisions of people on both sides of cultural change issues. The lessons here have application for anyone engaged in organizational change management.

As a psychiatrist working in a prison and a hospital in the British slum, Dr. Theodore Dalrymple has treated more than 10,000 patients that are a part of society referred to as the underclass. In *Life at the Bottom*, he describes the ailments of many of his former patients and, more importantly, the prevailing paradigms they hold that keep them perpetually trapped in this difficult way of life.

Not always financially poor, members of the underclass are identified more by their destructive and self-destructive behaviors (violence, neglect, substance abuse, physical abuse, etc.). The reader is introduced to several individuals including young women who are repeated abuse victims. Many of these women hold a view that their particular abusers are less abusive than others would be

and, therefore, are inclined to remain in the abusive relationship indefinitely.

Likewise, the reader meets several men prone to physical violence. Theirs is often a peculiar case where they are convinced they are “victims” of their own impulses—in which case violence is a natural response and should be expected—making the abused somehow responsible for inciting the violence against them. There are several groups within the underclass that are categorized according to similar behaviors. Dalrymple describes individual cases from several groups and summarizes the prevailing paradigms of each. While the specifics vary, several consistent themes emerge.

Another intriguing aspect of this book is the review of the government-sponsored social programs that unwittingly incentivize much of the anti-social behavior they hope to reduce. Being predisposed to poverty as the base cause of social ills,

the government has established numerous welfare oriented programs that provide considerable assistance to many people in society. It is striking to see how certain programs have been structured so as to contribute to the degenerative behavior of the underclass by freeing them from any responsibility to care for themselves. There is even one incredible account whereby former patients who are applying for government housing ask Dr. Dalrymple for reference letters that details their history of anti-social and destructive behaviors to strengthen their case to receive assistance. He notes that he has never received a request for a reference letter for affirming positive character and a sense of responsibility.

Details of individual tragedy are graphic but not too much so. They highlight the conditions and behaviors that inflict so much damage on society and are at the heart of the struggle between personal

responsibility, victimhood, and entitlement. *Life at the Bottom* is an intelligent look at this struggle from the views of both the underclass and those desiring to help them. And the lessons that are produced hold value for other organizations, including higher education, dealing with individuals of all types and issues of all complexities. For many initiatives, simple policy revisions are not enough to produce a desired change. When true cultural change needed, it is a difficult proposition—especially when current behaviors stem from deeply rooted, negative paradigms. Organizations with this understanding should produce better policies, better practices, and better results. ☪

Joe Whitefield, P.E.

Ted Weidner is assistant vice chancellor of facilities management & planning at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln; he can be reached at tweidner2@unlnotes.unl.edu.

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