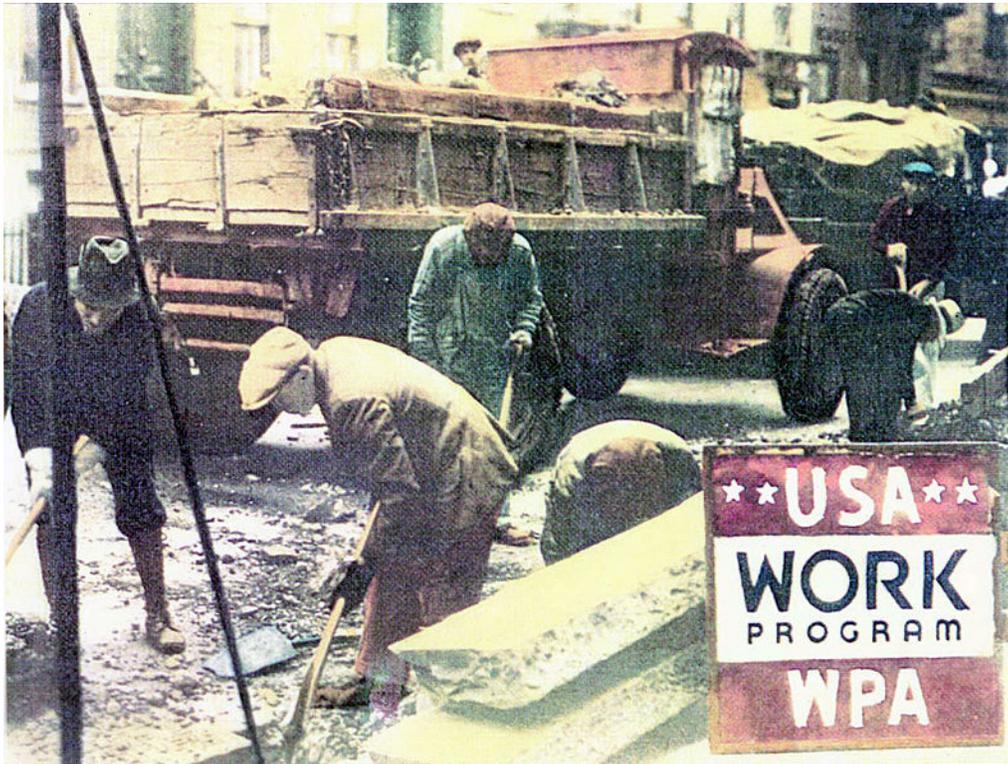


Different Paths

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“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...” That is how one of Robert Frost’s most famous poems, “The Road Not Taken,” begins. He goes on to consider what it means to take paths through life that have not been charted before. When considering what it means to experiment and discover new solutions, Frost’s poem is very appropriate. New solutions for new problems very rarely mirror solutions that have come before. While past experience and knowledge of previous answers are important when facing new challenges, ultimately the problem solver must try something untested. It is for this very reason that companies, governments and other organizations, when faced with a particularly difficult challenge, assign several different and independent groups the job of finding a solution. This increases the chances of solving the problem more quickly.

A period from American history that exemplifies this concept is the New Deal Era. During this period the American people, their government, and various companies across the country, embarked upon several different, *untested* courses of action to combat the Great Depression, and lift the country out of a downward spiral. Countless programs were imagined and initiated, groups invested in new technologies and techniques, and people sought out new ways to keep their lives on an even-keel. Most notably, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), serving as President of the United States, set about to establish a great variety of government programs. These programs were meant to nurture recovery on several different fronts. FDR understood the likelihood that certain plans, no matter how well-crafted, might fail to truly bring about recovery. Therefore, he called for the development of several.

Roosevelt turned to his “Brain Trust” to help create all these government programs. The Brain Trust was a group of cabinet members and advisors who were very close to the President. These men and women worked in all different fields, from economics and manufacturing, to the arts and anthropology. Each had his or her own area of expertise, and was asked by Roosevelt to create a solution specific to that particular area. Roosevelt was determined to not only mend the economic or financial injuries to the American people, but also to mend the injuries to their spirit, sense of initiative, purpose and creativity. Roosevelt viewed the Great Depression as a complicated problem that had arisen within a complicated society. Only a great number of various programs could address most of the country’s problems and also ensure that many of the programs survived.

Three important New Deal government programs were the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Such programs were part of FDR’s *alphabet soup* of policies.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was a group of young men between the ages of 18 and 25 who were responsible for helping to keep safe and cultivate certain natural resources across the United States. The CCC was incredibly popular. It was very successful in boosting the morale, or sense of well-being, among its workers. These young men were paid \$30 a month, sending \$25 home to their parents. Living in camps, they worked to plant new trees,

helped America's forests regrow, built roads, and made adjustments to the land to protect it from floods, fires and erosion.

The Tennessee Valley Authority is a government-owned corporation that sought to rejuvenate the economy of the Tennessee Valley region during the Great Depression. This corporation set out to fulfill these goals by constructing dams to generate hydroelectric power as well as building coal-burning plants to generate electricity. The TVA was incredibly successful in meeting the region's electricity needs. Countless individuals worked as part of the TVA's initiatives, whether constructing new dams and plants or operating existing ones.

The Works Progress Administration gave jobs to millions of Americans and was the largest New Deal program. WPA workers helped build roads and public buildings, including many schools. A smaller group of American artists, musicians, writers, actors and directors were also given jobs by the WPA. This was a large part of FDR's goal to heal more than just each American's money troubles. He wanted to help American culture grow, even during a time of great hardship. The WPA is credited with funding many murals and other pieces of art across the United States. These art pieces were meant to inspire and reenergize the American people. The program also gave artists the chance to practice their craft and earn a living wage.

The New Deal Era was a period in American history during which almost every possible solution you could imagine was tried. FDR was determined to hit the Great Depression with everything he could manage. It may be, however, that the efforts of the New Deal programs were not what finally ended the Great Depression. World War II broke out in 1939, and the United States entered the war in December of 1941. Many men became soldiers and many women went to work on military assembly lines. Almost overnight, American factories were producing everything from bullets and guns to tanks and airplanes. Uniforms needed to be stitched and food rations needed to be grown. It may be that this war effort was the single thing that helped most to put America back to work. Suddenly, the Great Depression was forgotten in the face of a military threat from overseas.