

# A Leader's Guide to Transformation

## Developing a Playbook for Successful Change Initiatives



# **A Leader's Guide to Transformation: Developing a Playbook for Successful Change Initiatives**

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## Foreword

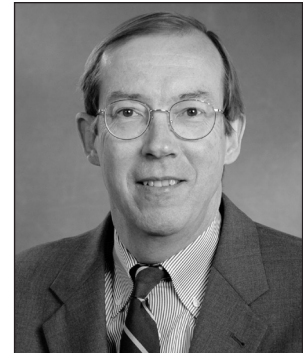
On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report, *A Leader's Guide to Transformation: Developing a Playbook for Successful Change Initiatives*, by Robert A. F. Reisner.

The publication of this report is particularly timely. The summer of 2011 was dominated by negotiations between Congress and the president concerning the deficit of the United States and the need to dramatically reduce federal spending in the decade ahead. There is little doubt that agencies across government will need to cut costs while maintaining, if not improving, the performance of their operations. The challenge thus facing government executives will be whether to use this unprecedented opportunity to transform their organizations while also making the necessary reductions in spending.

To assist government leaders in better understanding the characteristics of successful transformations, the IBM Center asked Robert Reisner, an expert in government transformation, to interview a select group of federal executives who have recently undertaken major transformation initiatives in their organizations. Based on these interviews, Mr. Reisner framed a series of interrelated steps which government executives should consider when they undertake any transformation initiative:

- Develop a compelling transformation game plan
- Align the transformation game plan with your mission
- Center your game plan with a reliable innovation process
- Transform strategically
- Design implementation to sustain transformation

Transformational change is not the steady, incremental improvement most government officials have spearheaded in the past. Success in transformation depends on getting the right changes done right. A key lesson from those interviewed is that transformation is indeed hard work, requiring intensive engagement with all stakeholders, including employees. All the leaders interviewed emphasized the importance of engaging employees and other stakeholders to shape the transformation. The goal of the



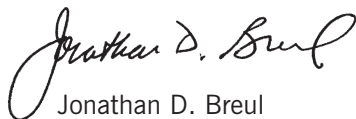
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transformation initiatives described in this report is to substantially change the way the organization operates, while building upon the history and culture of the organization. Transformation is clearly not for the faint-hearted, and in the modern networked age, it is likely to be far more consuming than any strategic challenge that has come before.

It is time for new ideas, re-thinking of old models, and the enthusiasm of new leadership to tackle old problems with fresh ideas and energy. We trust that this report will be a useful and informative guide for government executives at the federal, state, and local level as they work toward transforming their organizations for the future.



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# Understanding Transformation

*Transformation continues to be seen by noted practitioners and 21st century federal leaders as a compelling description of the essential change that is needed throughout the federal government. This guide, built from the experience of practitioners, offers insight into the dynamics of five critical steps to successful transformation. Recognizing the interconnected nature of developing a compelling plan, aligning it with mission, centering transformation with a reliable innovation process, being strategic about transformation, and building a sustainable design is crucial.*

*Engaging stakeholders at every interrelated step is equally important. Technology and transparency have already given stakeholders a seat at the table of the most sensitive discussions. In the future, transformation will be a joint-ownership enterprise that spans boundaries and involves constituencies in unprecedented ways. This emerging characteristic alone will require the successful leaders of future transformations to adopt a more democratic management style and build on the work of pioneers who have gone before.*

## Introduction: Transformation's Leadership Challenge

Throughout the federal government, there is a growing demand for effective leaders who can transform their agencies by implementing successful change initiatives that yield results. The pressure of budget reductions is redefining federal management practice. In agencies across the government, fewer resources are available. But there has been no corresponding decrease in the scope of the mission. This study describes new ways to create mission value in increasingly pressured times.

Some leaders have embraced the dilemmas caused by resource constraints as opportunities to introduce long-needed innovations and change the way that the business of government is done. But even the best leaders quickly find that transformation is hard work involving many choices and unexpected consequences.

This playbook offers a practical guide to help address the challenge of transforming organizations. The guide is based on a series of interviews with experienced practitioners who described how they tackled the challenge of transformation in government organizations. Their experience may offer plays for you to include in your own transformation playbook.

Much of the guide's content was gathered in the first half of 2011 in a series of interviews with transformational leaders in agencies across the federal government. The insights from these leaders, whose missions range from finance and diplomacy to delivering postal services and veterans' benefits, offer practical advice on making choices that can make one transformation initiative successful while others falls short. This guide uses their words to describe concepts that will help future leaders to design their own transformation game plan and choose the right plays to call.

## What is Transformation?

In keeping with the effort to make this a practical guide, it is useful to start with two basic questions:

- What is meant by transformation?
- Who will tomorrow's transformational leaders be?

**What is meant by transformation?** The question is not an insignificant one. For more than a decade, there has been a great deal of attention given to a variety of high-profile efforts, such as the Department of Defense (DOD) transformation and the transformation of the United States Postal Service (USPS). While some will say that the DOD and USPS transformations did not live up to the “hype” which accompanied their launch, they were important initial attempts at large-scale transformations. In interview after interview, today's government leaders reaffirmed the value of transformational change, of moving from one state to a fundamentally new one that builds upon the DNA of the traditional enterprise.

The guide has also been informed by successful examples of enterprise scale change (for example, the transformations of the Government Accountability Office and the Veterans Health Administration). Numerous successful, smaller-scale functional and process changes offer lessons for future enterprise-wide transformation initiatives. Even in the case of the DOD and USPS efforts, there is consensus that ground has been gained and lessons learned that should benefit future transformers.

A decade of experience with transformation initiatives has revealed the common characteristics of significant, transformational change. There are clear differences between the traditional, cautious, bureaucratic, siloed, command and control structures of the prototypical government agency and the agile, innovative, decentralized, technology-savvy character of a transformed government enterprise. One goal of this guide is to give government managers the benefit of the experience and insights of government executives with first-hand experience in leading transformation.

**Who will be the transformational leaders of the future? Will they be appointed? Will they be the heads of agencies? Are they going to occupy new positions in their agencies?** As the four questions imply, in a networked age, future leaders may come from almost any direction. There are examples of new, decentralized leadership styles emerging in organizations throughout the world today that depart from traditional top-down models. As some leading thinkers about management in the modern age have noted, the need for a hierarchical organization that makes the “trains run on time” is increasingly mismatched with the work of the modern, networked enterprise where operational effectiveness is expected and the new emphasis is on innovation. We should not expect that transformational leaders of the future would necessarily come from conventional succession plans alone. Leadership may come from mid-level management, line employees, and constituent groups. Tomorrow's agency heads will have to be exceptionally dexterous to sustain balance among these new forces. Thus, this guide is written for a very broad audience of both traditional and new leaders.

## Creating Mission Value

If the lead might come from anywhere, what steps should be taken to ensure successful transformation initiatives?

To answer such a basic question, the transformation leaders we interviewed often began by focusing on creating mission value. Mission value is created by delivering better service at less

cost. Strategies may include initiatives to increase quality or improve service or they may include efforts to cut costs and increase productivity. Unfortunately the potential conflict between more service and lower cost can sometimes set the transformation effort back. Improving service and quality can be costly. Cutting costs and gaining efficiency alone can alienate customers and workers.

Which strategy is the right one for your agency and when? These questions were addressed early on by the transformation leaders we interviewed, and were given prominence as they outlined their plans. One theme that came up consistently was the need for creative balance. If it appears that your only strategic option for improving mission value is one of costly service improvement, or alternatively, if cost-cutting seems to be the only viable path, then warning flags should be going up because the leaders interviewed here repeatedly spoke of the value offered by pursuing both paths in tandem to find a way to provide service improvements at lower costs.

To create meaningful change and sustain it will require careful selection of initiatives to balance opportunity, support from constituencies, and capacity to manage change initiatives. This search for the optimal balance was raised in multiple interviews. To add context to this observation and to make clear to future leaders what others have seen as their most important moves in response to an evolving technological and social context, this guide seeks to serve as a practitioners' highlight reel that illustrates how others found creative balance that worked for them.

# Five Steps to Transformation: Leaders' Views

## Introduction: The Interactive Parts

If you are already striving to lead transformational change, you know that many decisions will have to be made to improve service at lower cost. And you know that the right decision for your organization will depend on the strategic context. What are the changes reshaping your world and how quickly are they emerging? Where are you on the curve of change? Has the idea behind the initiative just been formulated, or are you implementing strategies that have been carefully vetted with key constituencies? Often the answer to these questions involves making tough calls, and leaders will be significantly aided by a core structure that guides their actions.

Five major themes emerged as transformation leaders described the basic steps they took in launching and implementing major change initiatives:

- Develop a compelling transformation game plan
- Align the transformation game plan with your mission
- Center your game plan with a reliable innovation process
- Transform strategically
- Design implementation to sustain transformation

What's important to see in overview is that these five steps interact with one another. The timing of your launch may determine how much innovation you can afford. Aligning your initiatives with your mission will set priorities for your implementation strategy. To create successful transformational initiatives that can be sustained, use this guide to confirm that you have considered the interactive dynamics of each phase in your strategy.

## Develop a Compelling Transformation Game Plan

Transformation initiatives, by their nature, should possess a sense of urgency. Yet controlling timing can be an important element of transformation strategy and should be considered carefully. Multiple leaders described their simultaneous recognition of the need for caution and appreciation for "burning platforms" that demand urgent change and help push it forward.

To manage timing, the transformation leader must create a compelling transformation game plan to guide the transformation initiatives so that they will yield purposeful change. This may not seem surprising. But the need to develop a compelling game plan becomes especially important when the need for change is driven by the presence of a burning platform, an urgent call to action. When the requirement for change is most obvious, a transformation game plan is needed the most to guide how and when action is to be sequenced. Creating an effective communications program and motivating transformation become more critical.

## Stakeholder Engagement

As you move through the steps outlined here, there will be a need to communicate with the key constituencies:

- Developing a compelling transformation game plan to create a framework for timing
- Aligning the transformation game plan with your mission
- Centering your game plan with a reliable innovation process
- Transforming strategically to balance innovation with tradition
- Implementing to sustain the program of transformation

At each stage, stakeholder audiences both inside and outside the agency need attention. Inside constituencies such as employee organizations and management will have strong views about transformational initiatives that can be expected to impact their interests. Outside the agency, private and public interests, local communities, customers, and suppliers all will have a stake in major decisions.

Effective leadership of change will anticipate the places where there will be natural support and opposition and focus on win-win opportunities. In the age of social communication networks, the need for interaction and anticipation of stakeholder reactions is becoming more intense each day.

Stakeholder engagement has become an integral part of the process of crafting the transformational leadership agenda. Traditionally, this has meant holding meetings and developing communications. Today, this is likely to involve technology, analytics, and fundamental transformational design.

You must shape the timing of the transformation deliberately to individualize your transformation plan whether or not the case for change is obvious. Large-scale transformations have many moving parts. Are your stakeholders supportive and willing participants? Are you ready to undertake the transformation now or do you need to build organizational capacity? In what areas will new skills and technologies be required to undertake the transformation initiative? Leading successful change requires you to manage the timing with your game plan.

### Seize Initiative to Lead Change

Do not lose sight of the imperative to lead the transformation. While balance may be essential to sustain transformational change, multiple leaders noted that waiting for stakeholder or Congressional guidance before undertaking change programs could cause transformation to founder.

The democratic process encourages Congress to listen to stakeholders; but interested parties often have a stake in traditional regulations and laws, the rules that define the status quo. In the coming days when missions and resources will, by necessity, be realigned to fit new budget realities, transformational leaders will be needed to show Congress and stakeholders the cost savings potential and mission effectiveness of alternative service delivery modes. Seizing initiative will be essential to communicating the reasons for the change.

### Choose When to Launch Deliberately

It is not only the case for change and the direction it takes that must be considered. The question of when to depart can be equally significant, and this question does not necessarily have an obvious answer. Even when change surrounds you, the right time for your customers and your employees to undertake radical change initiatives may still have not come.

Some leaders believe that timing takes care of itself; that once the path to change is opened through innovation or enabled through technology and transparency, customers will force change. Indeed they may. But as a leader of transformation, you need to consider the timing that is right for your agency.

*One leader said, "You have to create pathways for change. In the best of cases, when you open the path, the customers will drive the change."*

### Use Burning Platforms Judiciously

Many of the transformation leaders interviewed discussed the role of timing in driving events. When they had a burning platform, or an urgent mission requiring immediate action to comply with statutory deadlines, for example, the question of when to start was made much easier. One transformation leader described his mission to implement an executive order that was among the highest Obama Administration priorities and noted that this gave him advantages that enabled his organization to move widely accepted private-sector practices into the work of the agency.

Yet some of the transformation leaders who had relied on burning platforms to gain the momentum needed to act with care because this strategy is rife with unintended consequences. One transformation leader responsible for high-priority programs addressing urgent national priorities commented, "You can burn out by using the burning platform to gain support time after time. It takes a toll on staff and the leaders. You may find that it is easier to get started and yet harder to steer your chosen course."

### Use the Power of a Mandate Carefully

Multiple leaders described White House meetings in which they were given urgent direction. Many of the transformation leaders interviewed for this guide are responsible for implementing new laws. Some of the new laws require fundamental change in how they offer services to their constituents.

*You need to recognize that there are times, even in a crisis, when the best move may be no move at all. You can set back even the smartest initiatives when your facts are wrong or the capacity to deliver is shaky.*

Many of those interviewed frequently faced a call to action and found value in embracing the need to be positive and proactive. These opportunities to create political capital are often closely related to crisis management and are a tempting management panacea but they have a price. One experienced transformation leader commented, "With a new law to implement and impossible deadlines, the question of when to launch seems almost academic. All of the critical considerations involve how to launch effectively, not whether to do it."

Another transformation leader commented, "It can be a dangerous move to rely too heavily on external forces," because when you do, you lose the ability to time your launch to ensure optimal effectiveness. The leaders interviewed here had a nuanced appreciation for the difference between "urgency" and "crisis."

### Clear the Space for Objective Analysis

One problem with relying on exigent circumstances is that it makes analysis of trends more difficult. Urgent situations make it harder to pick your moment. When dynamics make a moment special and urgent and are given added significance as the justification for timing of a launch, it may be more difficult to see the multiple forces that contribute to shaping crisis

## **Postmaster General Patrick R. Donahoe Sustaining Transformation through Financial Crisis and Reinvention**

Patrick R. Donahoe was named the 73rd Postmaster General (PMG) of the United States on October 25, 2010. For the past six years, this 35-year veteran of the Postal Service had served as both the Deputy Postmaster General and the Chief Operating Officer of the USPS. As COO, he had a uniquely successful record of leading productivity and service performance improvement while reducing the costs of the agency in ways that had never before been achieved.

He came to the CEO's job with more operating experience and practical accomplishment than any predecessor. But he faces a time of crisis. He was called up to the Senate oversight committee on the day before he took office to attend a hearing that could not wait. The Postal Service that he leads lost more than \$5 billion last year and is projected to lose more than \$8 billion this year. There are issues related to pensions and retiree health care that would ease the way for several years, but none of these accounting adjustments, even if they were granted, would actually solve the underlying problem of costs that are too great for falling revenues. In recent years, the USPS has lost 20% of its volume and an even greater proportion of its most important product.

During the entire time that Pat Donahoe has been in the leading operating role, there has been an emphasis on transforming the Postal Service. In 2002, the four senators who led the oversight process directed the USPS to publish a transformation plan. This overarching document covered every aspect of the business, from operations to labor relations to marketing. Its aspirations included the creation of a performance culture and an agile competitive enterprise.

Yet much of what has been successful in postal transformation planning and execution has come in the operations area, where PMG Donahoe led the Postal Service in achieving record levels of service and customer satisfaction, significant workplace improvements, and a cumulative productivity increase of over 50 percent, including seven straight years of gains.

Key transformational strategies implemented under Donahoe are:

- Reorganization of postal operations
- Introduction of new methods of automation of flat letters and small parcels
- Introduction of Lean Six Sigma capabilities at the management level to facilitate continuous improvement of operational performance

During the 1990s, the USPS invested more than \$10 billion in automation. Once the personnel complement was adjusted and the organization learned to manage the new automated plants, USPS began to show productivity gains. But it was in the years following, when Pat Donahoe directed operations, that the USPS gained the returns on the human capital side by building processes and the capacity to improve performance.

His challenge today is to continue this process of right-sizing the capacity of the Postal Service while negotiating to sustain it in the short term through another round of postal reform. The outcome is not a given. The sources that generate costs in operations and facilities and those that limit the capacity of the service to raise prices are strong and their influence is deep.

In the short term, the USPS will need Congress to adjust payments imposed by recent reform legislation. But even if Congress makes those adjustments without strings attached that hamper the effectiveness of postal leadership, the problems of reducing costs dramatically to align with declining revenues will not have been solved. The task of the leader of the Postal Service will be not only to craft a vision of transformation and an ongoing transformation plan, but also to sustain it through ongoing challenging times.

events. There are times, even in a crisis, when the best move may be no move at all. Even the smartest initiatives can be set back when the information is wrong or the capacity to deliver is shaky. Setbacks can last a decade.

One leader reflected, “If your thinking is focused entirely by the effects of crises, you have lost control from the first. Such moments of crisis make it difficult to mobilize large collaborative groups because reason, orderly process, and legitimate problems are swept away.”

In the end, the diversity of experiences across the government is so wide that leaders will have to consider the implications of their individual context to time their launch carefully. As a leader you have to consider your options, your constituencies, and your resources. If you choose to seek to achieve transformation initiatives based on the urgency of a burning platform, you must recognize that you are likely to be sacrificing some analytic precision and deep understanding of the forces surrounding your action, and it will be difficult to sustain the response among large cross-boundary groups over time. There is a price to be paid for the benefits gained by the leader responding to the high-priority White House initiative. You need to decide that it's worth the price to use external forces to achieve urgency to stimulate action.

When all of these conditions have been met and noted, remember that the alternative is inaction and sustaining the status quo. Recognizing the price that may be paid, burning platforms do facilitate forward motion.

## Align the Transformation Game Plan with Your Mission

To succeed, you will need to understand that transformation depends on your agency making the connection between the traditional enterprise and a future vision that will be viable in the emerging marketplace. To be effective as a leader of change and to ensure the integrity of your message, you will have to make sure that the change is consistent with the law, practice, and with oversight. Aligning change initiatives with a rigorous definition of mission gives you a tool for prioritizing change that matters.

### Begin with Mission Alignment

One transformation leader explained, “Aligning your initiative with the mission of the agency is always the key step. Establishing a measure with which you can define value should come from that process.” Undertaking the stages of planning, implementation, and review of a transformation initiative begins with mission alignment.

*“Aligning your initiative with the mission of the agency is always the key step.”*

If you can establish a clear measure of value (e.g., educating tomorrow's leaders one person at a time or growing competitive revenues by x percent), you will have a basis for comparing the efficiency and effectiveness of your initiatives in achieving that specific goal. Identifying a core measure of mission value may not be the only criterion for deciding on a new delivery pathway. But having a measure of value does allow the opportunity to make decision-making open and consistent. Several transformation leaders talked about the need to have a central metric that is aligned with mission. A central metric offers a starting point for choosing the optimal path among the various service improvement and cost-reduction alternatives.

### Balance Cost Reduction with Service Improvement

The phrase “You can't cost cut your way to success” is repeated often by transformational leaders. But it's not always clear exactly what this phrase means. There have been many

## **William Taggart**

### **Collaborating to Define the Vision of the Future**

William J. Taggart, the former Chief Operating Officer of the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA), came to the Department of Education from a career in banking at a time of intense, disruptive change. The Federal Student Aid program is a unique federal enterprise. FSA was the first Performance-Based Organization in government. In the late 1990s, Congress created Performance-Based Organizations in a few agencies as part of an innovative bargain in which unprecedented management freedom was granted to select federal agencies in exchange for the explicit requirement to achieve demonstrable performance improvement.

In recent years, the FSA's ability to accomplish its mission of modernizing and improving the delivery of student financial assistance was challenged by scandal and then financial crisis. In 2007, the student financial aid industry was shaken by allegations of revenue-sharing agreements, referral fees, and other conflicts of interest. This led to multiple reform laws that have changed the nature of the student loan industry and the mission of the Federal Student Aid program in the matter of a few years. But perhaps even more difficult, certainly for those served by FSA, has been the changing financial marketplace after the financial crisis of 2008.

Bill Taggart came to FSA at this transformational time of reassessment and rebuilding. New laws eliminated direct payments to lenders and guarantee agencies. New funds were made available for students. The department was given authority to buy unencumbered loans. New disclosure provisions were established and the standardization of documents was required. In short, the agency was required to retool many of its core processes.

Additionally, during the economic stimulus effort there were significant increases in funding for federal financial student aid. These laws changed the nature of the assistance process, its requirements, and to some extent the role that the FSA is expected to play in the financial aid marketplace.

President Obama's FY 2010 budget significantly expanded federal student aid programs with more than \$129 billion in new grants, loans, and work-study assistance in 2010—a 32-percent increase over the amount available in 2008—to help more than 14 million students and their families pay for college.

Bill Taggart confronted the critical need for leadership by focusing on collaborating with the employees of FSA to define a vision of the future that could become a framing concept for arriving at a new mission definition and then he extended the collaboration process to industry partners as well. This cross-boundary collaboration was especially important at FSA, since 85 percent of the operating budget was for services delivered by private sector partners (loan servicing, technology, loan operations). Bill Taggart brought 24 years of business management experience, having served as the chief operating officer of corporate and investment banking at Wachovia. But nothing could have offered an exact model for what FSA was soon to face.

In this environment of fundamental program change, in which federal lending replaced the role formerly played by the banks, Bill Taggart was confronted with a need to focus the agency on a compelling, straightforward mission. While the industry opposed shifting lending responsibility to the federal government, and policy analysts debated whether this change would save money and increase lending to students, Bill Taggart began building a mission vision that could guide transformation by meeting with the employees of FSA. Collaborative development of a new vision of the agency mission began there, with the workforce activated to reconstruct a collective sense of mission one step at a time.

instances in the past decade when technology change has permitted dramatic cost reductions and process changes. This in turn has allowed the leaders of public institutions to achieve significant efficiency improvements. Clearly cost-reduction initiatives can be critical, especially as budgets are cut.

In the view of several transformational leaders, creating alignment with mission, examining alternative service delivery methods, and responding to constituent and Congressional expectations will be necessary transformational skills in the future. Future transformation leaders will also face the twin challenges of narrowing agency mission to accommodate a new budget, while enhancing service delivery. Narrowing the federal footprint and optimizing delivery channels to match customer requirements and expectations—these are themes likely to be heard with growing frequency in the coming years. But no formula has emerged for crafting simple solutions.

Beginning the conversation with mission is seen by many transformation leaders as a critical framework for reconciling potential conflicts between budget reductions and service changes, providing a point of perspective for finding the creative balance point.

### Engage Stakeholders at Every Step

Aligning change initiatives with mission will help throughout the process of winning support for defining the optimal formula for creating mission value. In the networked age of social media, stakeholder engagement has become an ever-more encompassing task that was brought up by virtually every leader we interviewed. As a result, there is value in considering how best to engage stakeholders in every step of the transformation.

- **Define mission collaboratively with your employees.**

One leader faced with the task of implementing a new law mandating fundamental changes in his agency's core service delivery described an elaborate bottom-up process that he used to re-craft the mission description of the agency. More was at stake, he explained, than creating a new business model. For his agency, a fundamental cultural challenge had to be addressed as the new legislation had emerged after a near-breakdown in operations resulting in controversy and newspaper headlines. To build the agency's mission vision from the bottom up, he met with all the senior employees and took personal responsibility for leading group meetings facilitating the development of a new mission statement.

*The task of aligning mission with budget realities will have to involve stakeholders and Congress.*

- **Use mission definition to build shared vision.** In another agency, the leadership had a new law to implement (as did many of the transformational leaders interviewed here). A legacy of controversy and recent crisis had roiled the agency. This leader faced the issue common to a number of agencies: rationalizing and even narrowing multiple programs with diffuse missions. The chief operating officer and the leader interviewed here met with each of the program leads and senior officers of the agency to clarify, and in some cases, refine the missions of the programs using more rigorous standards to narrow scope. Building on this disciplined process of review, the mission definition sessions drove the creation of a systematic management review process that will soon fit into the GPRA Modernization Act model. (In December 2009, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010. The first quarterly performance reviews required under the new law were conducted in June 2011.)
- **Seek top-level clarity about mission.** In one department, the secretary has led the definition of a short list of priority missions. Outlining five clear priorities provides a supportive

structure for review. In the case of the leader interviewed here, it established a framework in which to prioritize budget allocation and the definition of change initiatives across departmental and program boundaries.

- **Make mission personal to every manager.** Another leader who has responsibility for an agency rife with controversy found the need to define roles and missions consciously. His solution for sustaining focus on operating missions is to define individual missions with precision and have individual managers sign off on the scope of their role. “I don't need to have everyone focused on Congress, for example.” His philosophy has been to focus effort on the things that can be measured and improved on, and to concentrate on creating an architecture of individualized mission roles.

### Personally Lead a Transformation Dialogue

Many of these initial insights involve change that is personal and individual. Not surprisingly, change that cuts this deep will evoke a reaction from powerful core constituencies. Many see this as an opportunity to create a dialogue about the future. Ultimately this conversation will involve Congressional oversight committees.

A broad conversation about transformational strategies offers an opportunity for a more meaningful dialogue to shape the details of achieving mission definition with fewer resources. By examining alternative strategies for increasing the mission value—new service delivery approaches, new investments in technology that promise to reduce costs and improve productivity—leaders have been able to broaden the conversation and to have the chance to offer concepts for creating mission value in new ways. Instead of focusing only on cutting costs and therefore creating future dilemmas about mission and service, the transformational dialogue offers an opportunity to talk about creating mission value and finding the optimal balance.

### Center Your Game Plan with a Reliable Innovation Process

Transforming a complex federal agency must rely on an innovation process that can generate imaginative and reliable change initiatives. This is the core engine of transformation and your innovation process must have the capacity to formulate a new vision for change initiatives that can create the dependable building blocks of an organization that will thrive in the emerging marketplace. Having a reliable innovation process will allow you to center your transformation initiatives in a way that connects traditional mission with the future.

In many cases today, this requirement is one that depends upon the ability to anticipate the future in a time of disruptive change. Traditional customers or beneficiaries who have been the focal point of the agency may be encouraging you to make only incremental change that will depend on sustaining technology. Yet if future customers were to have a voice, they might support disruptive alternatives to past performance.

The concept of innovation is at the heart of transformation. By definition, transformation requires fundamental changes and a vision of an alternative future, the work of innovation. One of the leaders who experienced the many barriers to implementing major change initiatives saw his central task to be introducing new applications and facilitating the use of new technologies to create an innovation environment.

*Innovation is the core of transformation since there is a need for a vision of the future destination to shape the transformation process.*

“We can make things happen in 15 minutes and we can handle the clearance process for federal managers; what

happens from there is up to them,” said one promoter of innovation. One of the most significant aspects of the approach taken here is the way in which this leader was offering his customers a clear value proposition for adopting the innovations for which he was responsible. By using his innovative tools rather than creating their own, customers were able to accelerate the sometimes cumbersome clearance process.

### **Be Realistic About the Speed of Transformation Initiatives**

Several of the transformation leaders interviewed faced dilemmas over the speed with which they should implement new initiatives. Even when innovations promise better service or new cost reductions, there is still a need to line up support. Few transformations take place in a vacuum. Few leaders, if any, work in settings where there are no interested parties. The various constituent interests may have strong views on the need for action and the type of action that should be taken. Some strategies may offer better results but are clearly riskier than others. In almost no case will the new approach be as cost-effective from day one as the traditional way of doing business, the one likely to be favored by line manager interests. When a simple comparison is made between the traditional way of doing business and the innovative path, the new route may be more promising in the long run but is almost always less likely to be superior in its infancy.

*The movement that has evolved beyond transparency to “democratizing data” has driven a number of the important innovation initiatives even as much of the discussion involved efforts to shape the future.*

### **Democratizing Data to Add Leverage**

One source of innovation that a number of transformational leaders draw on is the movement to make data public, highlighted during the Recovery Act initiative of the Obama administration. Recovery.gov’s use of transparency and data availability drew on experiments in the District of Columbia, New York, Baltimore, and other places. Customizing raw data by creating “democracy apps” that encourage citizens to co-create with their government is a driving force behind these innovative programs.

### **Judiciously Select the Moments When Radical Change is Required**

Creating the process for innovation will make it clearer and easier to make decisions about alternative courses of action. The creation of an innovation process allows transformation leaders to not only formulate strategy that will yield the best balanced choice, but also highlights those times when transformational change cannot be achieved using traditional business models and methodologies and when radical change is needed to achieve the organization’s transformation goals. When is it necessary to invest in radical change? When are the riskier investments in new technologies warranted? To answer these questions, a leader must identify strategies that can’t be found using business as usual. Choosing the moments for radical departure carefully protects innovation from becoming isolated and marginalized.

### **Learn from the New Open Collaboration Models**

One of the leaders responsible for implementing a controversial new law described the process of bringing transparent government tools to bear in formulating regulations and brokering disputes among previously unreachable interested parties. He believes that transparent enterprise and open government policies can play a critical role in implementing a new reform law that follows years of conflict. Opening government and encouraging stakeholder participation in implementing the new law enable collaboration and compromise on a broader scale.

## **Richard Spires**

### **Using Private Sector Best Practices to Define the Path to Change**

Richard Spires, the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Homeland Security, has deep experience in both the public and private sectors. Prior to joining DHS, he had a similar CIO responsibility at the Internal Revenue Service (as CIO and in other positions from 2004–2008). He also brought private-sector experience to these government jobs, as the former CEO of Mantas Corporation and an executive with SRA International.

In DHS, the CIO leads a highly dispersed enterprise with more than a dozen agencies that were put together in 2003, and are still seeking to achieve departmental alignment. A key point of emphasis for CIO Spires has been to bring best-practice models from the private sector to his role at DHS, which includes closing data centers, moving to cloud computing, improving program governance, and strengthening program management.

For the managers of critical services such as IT support, a dispersed structure of traditional agencies quickly becomes siloed as managers seek to control the resources and the services that they perceive they need to achieve their missions. Yet no matter how understandable the impulse may be, its consequence is to lose the efficiency savings that are commonly available through consolidation and shared services.

Data center consolidation represents one of several department-wide initiatives that seek to unite the far-flung department and to implement and manage cross-organizational efforts while promoting green IT, reducing costs, and increasing the overall IT security posture of the government. There are 43 legacy data centers that are being consolidated into two principal facilities. Since the beginning of the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative (FDCCI), DHS has closed one data center, with an additional four planned for closure by the end of 2011. DHS's goal is to close more than 40 existing data centers by the end of FY 2014.

Consolidation and transformation of the DHS IT infrastructure has been a massive undertaking. For example, there is the need to create and scale significant new capabilities. A cloud-first policy seeks to advance this goal. DHS launched E-Verify Self Check in March 2011 as a free, Internet-based service application that workers can use to confirm employment eligibility in the United States. Self-Check leverages public cloud capabilities and is scheduled for availability nationwide in 2012. Also, in March of 2011, DHS became the first to leverage GSA's Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) offering to expedite and facilitate movement of DHS's publicly facing websites to a public cloud. The value of reaching to best practice models is that they offer a common vision and records of demonstrable performance improvement. Using such private-sector comparisons also provides a framework for analysis and review.

DHS IT management has transformed and improved its current IT Program Reviews by adopting the TechStat process and criteria, which enables deep-dive analysis into select IT programs. The first DHS TechStat review session was held at the end of March 2011 and focused on the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), an IT modernization effort that will improve the nation's national security posture by implementing a person-centric approach. As a result of TechStat, the department reformed its acquisition strategy to support modular development, engaged agency leadership, assigned dedicated resources throughout the program's lifecycle, and enforced direct line of accountability to the OCIO.

To facilitate coordination and consolidation of services, Mr. Spires is the chairman of the DHS Chief Information Officer Council and the Enterprise Architecture Board. He leads the effort to support the secretary's goal of unifying and maturing DHS—one DHS, one enterprise, a shared vision, and integrated results-based operations. Mr. Spires also serves as vice chairman of the Federal CIO Council, and co-chairs the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative.

In the modern technology environment, there are many new opportunities for creating collaboration and sharing services. Budget necessities may ease resistance and make it easier for some in siloed areas to readjust their thinking. Even so, collaboration among federal programs may come more easily than collaboration between federal service providers and non-governmental stakeholders, an area that the technology of cross-boundary collaboration may make the next frontier to be managed. In some agencies, leaders have used best practice models to overcome cultural resistance to change.

## Transform Strategically

Transformation initiatives can be challenging to lead and require subtlety to manage efficiently. An illustration of this is the potential tension between supporting initiatives that require only incremental change and sustaining technology and those that embrace disruptive change. Effective leadership of change initiatives requires that both traditional line managers and the leaders of innovation be participants in the transformation program. Knowing when to turn to the organizational savvy of the inside line managers and when to support the “young turks” is the essence of creating a strategic approach to transformation.

## Use Best Practices to Drive Transformation

One of the transformation leaders interviewed described a situation in which a best practice had been used to highlight the differences between the desired state and the status quo. Using this best practice standard, his department showed the clear value of adopting management practices that are now common in the private sector.

Were the line managers reluctant to change? “The issue is not so much that the owners of the stovepipes did not want to do it,” he said. “The issue [was that] the investment in transformation was difficult for line managers because it took decision-making out of their hands.” The choice to them was the difference between control and reaching a new level that could be equated with best practice. He said that the debate about best practice was about the capacity to achieve performance goals rather than about bureaucratic power. By retaining control over even suboptimal resources, they would ensure that even if they fell short of best practice they could still achieve results. It’s important to understand the trade-off between the line manager and the innovators.

## Assemble Joint Teams of Young Turks and Line Managers

A key consideration in formulating a transformation strategy is the need to balance the interests of line managers and their processes with an investment in innovation. Transformational managers seldom get to work with a greenfield situation. More typically, there are interests, constituencies, and even competitive service delivery alternatives. When this is the case, there is a need to select the most valuable places to invest scarce resources to effect change.

One transformation leader we interviewed had been grappling with a difficult problem involving interagency priorities and the need to achieve collaboration to define requirements, technology solutions, and security issues in a joint task force with another department. He discussed the need to bring along the people who “keep the lights on.” The challenge of bringing along line managers becomes all the more important when coping with large, complicated interagency implementation issues. One of your highest priorities will be to find ways to bring along line managers without losing the energy that is generated around innovation. The innovation can be the most exciting work that your staff is doing and it’s easy to allow it to become sequestered in a skunkworks. But isolating the innovators may risk marginalizing them. The objective should be to make collaboration feasible, which can mean a trade-off between creating new solutions and using traditional pathways to implementation.

## Dan Tangherlini

### Focusing Review with Mission Definition

Daniel M. Tangherlini is Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Management, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Performance Officer. His time at the Department of the Treasury coincides with a transformational period when the department has had to evaluate and assess its actions during the financial crisis of 2008–09, to lead economic policy-making during the recovery, and to make necessary adjustments to new laws and responsibilities.

Dan Tangherlini came to the Obama administration after serving as the city administrator of Washington, D.C., where he was one of the champions of new open government initiatives and the democratization of data. He was previously the interim general manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which is responsible for the operations of the D.C. Metrorail and Metrobus systems. Tangherlini also worked for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

His diverse and practical experience may have been critical in addressing one of Treasury's highest priorities in recent years: the need to better understand the financial crisis that has framed Treasury's work since 2008. Evaluation of the Treasury's performance and role during the time of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (2008–09) has been ever-present. The TARP program changed in mid-flight (prior to the January 2009 inauguration of President Obama) when the priority focus turned from acquisition of troubled assets to investment in the financial recovery of critical institutions, leaving Treasury with a new role in the American economy.

A second fundamental change came when Treasury was given vastly expanded responsibilities under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Treasury was given expanded bond issuing authorities for schools, infrastructure, public housing, renewable energy, and other public investments. The IRS was given new responsibilities for granting tax credits, and Treasury for issuing new tax policy guidance.

Most recently, Treasury established the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and has received new oversight responsibilities under the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.

Each of these major responsibilities illustrates that this has been a critical time of mission review at Treasury. The actions taken in guiding these activities also come at a time when the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 has given agencies throughout the government responsibility for rethinking the missions of their various components. Treasury's actions have served as a model for reviews that will happen throughout government when the GPRA Modernization Act review process is established. Treasury, as much as any agency, faces the question of how to do the day-to-day blocking and tackling of managing the business of government when dramatic changes are reshaping the environment.

Dan Tangherlini is in a position where the global and the operational must meet in providing resources, maintaining records, and managing the operations of a core federal agency in the midst of change. As the chief performance officer, Tangherlini has responsibility for Treasury's performance goals. Above all, Treasury has been responsible, as its first goal, for leading the stabilization of the financial system and guaranteeing economic opportunity. The second goal concerns the tax system, where voluntary compliance and simplification are critical. As its third goal, Treasury is focused on increasing paperless transactions. The three goals illustrate the range of Treasury's responsibilities—from global and national economic systems to the retail and resource level of managing the agency. The role of the chief performance officer has been to translate these missions into an effective management framework to guide the actions of individual managers.

To make this process practical, and to address the challenge of adjusting to resource constraints, Tangherlini's leadership focused on mission definition and framed the discussion with a return to basics.

It is important to remember that line managers bring an institutional memory and understanding of how to get things done. Past problems can inform the future. One downside of this institutional memory, as noted by one of the transformation leaders interviewed for this paper, is that sometimes line managers are wedded to traditional practices. The government's traditional acquisition culture, for example, has emphasized transactions. There are many different reasons for this. For some, this piecemeal approach to acquisition is less ambiguous and entails less risk to the procurement officer than the alternative approach to engagement with the business owners and program managers. Building opportunities for collaboration is nonetheless essential and structuring joint teams of young turks and established line managers to facilitate such efforts will be increasingly important.

### **Build Joint Ownership through Review**

Strategic investment in new service development can be connected in integral ways with the implementation and management process by creating joint ownership of the investment. In one agency, the use of the IT dashboard brought together all of the interested parties and permitted the federal chief information officer and agency chief information officers to reach agreement on performance and then to expect performance improvement. With the new quarterly reviews that will be mandated by the GPRM Modernization Act, this type of focus and collaboration will create a process that may be useful for other senior functions.

### **Find the Path to Maximize Consensus**

One transformation leader noted that project analysis, especially in an environment of shrinking budgets, requires that strategic planners consider the way that line managers will view investment alternatives. He described an elaborate process that his agency uses to rank projects and prioritize the ones that have support. Degree of support is then compared with risk and ease of accomplishment. The goal is to find an investment pathway that emphasizes adoption of all reasonable projects that are advancing the agenda of the line managers.

### **Design Implementation to Sustain Transformation**

Many of the transformation leaders interviewed had insights into the process of sustaining the changes that they had introduced. They suggest a variety of tactics that can help make the implementation process successful. All the transformation leaders interviewed viewed collaboration as an essential element of modern organization and crucial to the implementation challenges to transformation initiatives.

### **Explicitly Recognize the Inevitable Barriers**

One transformational leader described being called to an urgent meeting at the White House with a high-priority request to create something that could not normally be achieved in a short time frame. But instead of listing barriers, he brought a list of actions necessary to override the normal obstacles. Ultimately, his value proposition to his customers was that he had gained the permissions they would need. By aligning with him, they could ride on his success. The second part of his method was to feed back the reaction he encountered to the policy officials who were seeking to expedite the normal implementation process. On the one hand, he was expediting the comment process, but on the other he was taking the substance of the comments directly back to policy makers.

### **Design Sustainable Change Initiatives from the Start**

The interviews with transformation leaders offered the following suggestions as ways to build an implementation plan that would nurture sustainable initiatives:

## **Roger Baker** **Leading IT Collaboration**

Roger W. Baker is the Chief Information Officer of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VA's Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, where he manages an organization of over 7,500 information technology professionals with a budget of over \$3.3 billion. He came to the VA at the time of national health care reform debate, when civilian health policies were being rethought across a spectrum broad enough to impact virtually every health care institution. It is also a time when the U.S. is fighting two major wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating pressures on both DOD and the VA to improve collaboration.

Mr. Baker joined VA with an extensive background in IT service management. He has worked for a mid-sized IT services and integration company (as CEO of Dataline LLC), served as CIO at General Dynamics Information Technology, and was Executive Vice President and General Manager of the Telecommunications and Information Assurance business group of CACI International. He also brought prior government service to his VA position, having served from 1998–2001 as the CIO at the U.S. Department of Commerce. In addition to this formal IT experience, he also participated in the Internet boom years as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of BlueGill Technologies, a market leader in Internet bill presentment; as Vice President of Engineering and Operations at VISA International, where he was responsible for the creation and operation of the VISA interactive banking system; and as Vice President of Consulting and Services for Verdix Corporation.

This industry experience has been critical to Mr. Baker's transformation of the VA's IT services infrastructure. Experience has lent credibility to his efforts to consolidate data centers and achieve more than a billion dollars of net cost savings. Equally important, it has informed Mr. Baker's emphasis on mentoring and training the field IT staff.

While there have been opportunities for consolidation at VA, there is also a traditionally decentralized enterprise with data management resources spread across the nation. Building capacity and mentoring IT professionals throughout this structure has received Mr. Baker's high-priority interest. He believes that his experience as a CEO, as opposed to a CIO, was his most important training for his current assignment, because he gained experience with a breadth of management responsibilities, including human capital resources and the need for return on investment. This managerial approach has been critical in shaping his approach to investing in the VA's infrastructure.

Mr. Baker has found the alignment of objectives and management support from departmental management and Congress (expressed in the continuous reaffirmation of agency mission) to have played a critical role in the success that VA has achieved both in cutting costs and building cross-agency collaboration. In addition to initial success in cutting costs through consolidation and supporting the president's goals for open government, VA's mission has required building alignment with the Department of Defense and with other health care institutions across traditional organizational boundaries. Mission clarity and alignment has been a key enabler in establishing collaborative relationships for VA.

- **Recognize the cross-boundary challenges.** Multiple leaders reported that cross-agency implementation and trans-boundary questions have become a growing challenge to their change initiatives. This increasingly common scenario in the federal government will require additional consideration to addressing the issue of “buying in” by constituencies. But you should recognize that this would subject your change initiatives to constituency pressures and growing complexity that will come from new directions and will confront you with new agendas.
- Sustaining transformation initiatives will require more than understanding costs and effectiveness; there is also a need to create processes that are seen as legitimate.*
- **Make the performance review work for you.** The process of clarifying performance and reviewing its effectiveness is a common theme across the government; under the GPRA Modernization Act, it will only increase in importance. Making performance review meetings into increasingly effective sessions for performance improvement will be a central concern of federal leaders. Anchoring these discussions with a rigorous framework of mission that focuses the discussion on achieving mission value will be a major step allowing you, like some of the transformational leaders interviewed here, to successfully implement the GPRA Modernization Act.
  - **Sustain change with review anchored by mission.** “Anchoring the review discussions with a rigorous understanding of mission and how to create value is critical to being able to adjust to budget constraints,” said one transformational leader. One of the themes that can be heard throughout these discussions is the need to find strategies to sustain change. A leader who has created one of the boldest lists of change initiatives was most conscious of the challenge of sustaining the gain.
  - **Build ties to the change.** Creating a user group of experienced managers who have a stake in continuing to improve on the change was a key theme of one leader. He believed that this experience base was critical to future success.
  - **Build a constituency for innovation.** Another leader noted that the process of creating open innovation would itself be a vehicle for understanding the views of constituencies and encouraging interaction. The modern enterprise is going to have constituencies within constituencies as suppliers, customers, and employees become engaged in the process of decision-making when their actions and performance become increasingly transparent.
  - **Gain permission to innovate.** One leader described his challenge of overcoming deeply held beliefs that locked incumbent managers into traditional views. Permission to innovate was won by sustaining service levels. Through this he was able to gain leverage with customers and with his managers. His was a case of an acute need to understand multiple constituencies to see how they influenced change. He noted that they were motivated by goals and incentives that sometimes differed from those of his agency and they often formed their own alliances. His ability to demonstrate that service could be maintained in spite of changes to business as usual meant that he was able to bring the diverse constituency interests along.

## Final Notes: The Arc of Change

Many of the insights that transformational leaders have offered here are presented as individual plays in a practitioner's playbook. These are ideas that others have tried in seeking to achieve transformational change in their agencies. Seen as a group, the concepts have an interconnection and offer a future direction. They build upon a concrete need to anchor change in the mission of the agency. They encourage innovation, but not without the collaboration of line managers who have been there before and have seen both change that worked and change that evaporated quickly after the energy of the launch was expended.

In a time of budget cuts and significant resource reallocation, transformational change that can deliver mission value more efficiently will be increasingly important. Yet, as these managers explained, this is not simply a story about innovation. To anticipate the issues that change will bring in the networked marketplace, there is also the need to bring along all managers in the organization as well as the relevant constituencies. The reality is that often decisions are arrived at in public, with transparent governance processes that must be defended publicly as well. The implementation process in such a changed marketplace will emphasize collaboration to an extent that was never before the case. The starting point for building such trust and cooperation will be a shared commitment to mission.

What is easily missed is the speed with which the forces that define the current marketplace have changed. We accept new practices today that were not possible a decade ago. Innovations often have changed practices that have evolved over decades and even longer. To sustain transformation that is described here leaders are calling plays and creating individual game plans that must anticipate an arc of change by planning today's transformations to position their agencies for the next round of transformation. The five steps outlined here offer a foundation for building structures to anticipate the future and to help shape it.

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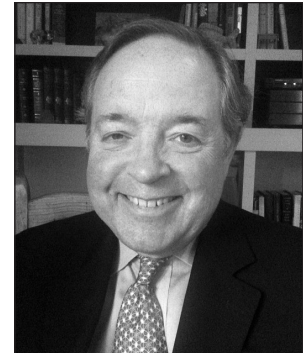
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Mr. Reisner has worked as a management consultant and as a government executive on challenges facing federal leaders since the 1970s. In 1993, he was recruited to join the United States Postal Service as Vice President for Technology Applications. He also served as Vice President for Strategic Planning and was responsible for leading the development of the first two Five Year Strategic Plans mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 for one of the largest and most strategically challenged government enterprises in the world.

He is the author of “When a Turnaround Stalls” in the *Harvard Business Review* (February 2002) and numerous technical papers on issues ranging from strategic planning to innovation to institutional transformation. He has taught classes and lectured on these issues in multiple settings from the Yale School of Management to the National War College to the Master Class of the National Association of Corporate Directors.

Mr. Reisner is a graduate of Harvard Business School (MBA) and Yale University (BA) where he received the Corning Traveling Fellowship.



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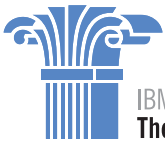
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