

What Transformative Leaders Can Do to Initiate and Institute Effective Federal Change

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1. Introduction

Many Americans have the expectation that their government through the mix of public policies and pragmatism will respond to its citizens' core needs, and when this requires change, that progress will be straightforward. However, in reality, achieving successful transformation and change in government can be exceptionally challenging. Sometimes political or economic conditions have changed, sometimes methods for achieving progress are outdated or obsolete, and sometimes the public's expectations have changed.

The Federal government can be trusted to reliably do much good for its citizens. Year in and year out the government provides essential services without a hitch: retirees receive their Social Security checks on time, medical support is provided for the poor, and our nation's security apparatus provides globally-deployed defense forces across all time zones. Despite these benefits, some citizens have grown to expect instantaneous results from a system that was not designed for speed. This could be anticipated if one's expectations are influenced by the experience of using modern apps on an iPhone or Android to instantly contact a ride, buy a new suit, or find a restaurant. To people unfamiliar with the inner workings of government political change seems to be stymied by complexity and confounded by process. But our government was designed to be careful and deliberative, with the legislative process being sometimes contentious. Within this context, government leaders need to discern how to manage achieving the art of what is possible.

Focus on Transformative Leadership

This paper examines why achieving major change and transformation in the public sector is perceived as so difficult. While the public expects the Federal government to be able to resolve issues quickly, there are many barriers. The paper examines how barriers to making rapid change are woven into the fabric of the governing process. It also examines factors that have emerged over time, such as the role of associations, that make it surprising the government accomplishes as much as it does. In contrast, there are multiple positive case examples of change that show how agencies can achieve positive transformation. These examples will be examined in greater depth later in the paper. The last section is a discussion of principles and lessons learned that have proved effective for achieving transformation. The paper also offers ideas as to what can be done to make efforts in the Federal sector more effective. By the end of the paper, the reader will have gained perspective on how to achieve organizational change amidst the context of many challenges. This paper explores challenges to transformation, and reviews relevant literature and examples. The main questions posed are: "Why is change so difficult in U.S. Federal organizations?", "What are the foundational and constitutional factors that make government so difficult to transform?", and finally, "What are the factors and principles to consider when attempting to implement transformation or change projects?"

The first section sets the stage for an in-depth examination of why achieving change and transformation within government is so arduous. The foundations of Federal gov-

ernment are by their nature a compromise, and the purposes served by our government cannot be as focused nor efficient as those of private-sector companies, because the government serves multiple purposes and stakeholders. Private entities have the bottom line goal of profit, while government is tasked with providing far more diffuse and shifting goals without a singularly clear bottom line. This section will review the constitutional basis and related historical developments that make transformation challenging, thus providing useful background for change practitioners.

The second section discusses other factors that have emerged in government over the course of time that make transformation difficult. The next section looks at some positive examples of government transformation and change projects. The final section explores some of the key principles that public-sector leaders can apply to make government transformation and change possible. By public-sector leaders we mean staff in Federal, state, county, or local municipalities who are in a position to have a positive influence. They could be elected officials, appointees, or career civil servants. A few important themes are elaborated in some detail, and this includes a consideration of the role of information technology as a critical enabler. Another key theme is the importance of correctly measuring change while offering insights into the common errors in misreading change results. (Buckley, Mea, Weise, & Carraher, 1998).

Reexamining the Prior Assessment on Public Sector Transformation

Over a decade ago the author published an article in an international journal that compared organizational transformation efforts in the public and private sectors. (Mea, Sims, & Veres, 2000). The article defined the essential elements for change and provided vignettes from failing and successful projects in both sectors. At the time of publication the author was a “Big Five” management consultant who worked primarily with successful Fortune

1000 companies, but who occasionally was assigned to Federal projects. Management consultants of that period typically valued rapid decision-making, decisive action, analytical precision, and simplicity – values that drive business profitability and that reflected the most profitable markets. The author noted that government contains significant restrictions on action and noted that a different set of values and skills may be needed to make change achievable within the public sector. Other assumptions, competencies, and wisdom, need to be brought to the table when helping government organizations transform themselves.

Government and Private Sectors, A Contrast in Style

As a young consultant, the author noted a striking contrast between private-sector firms’ leaders and Federal managers. With regard to style and decision-making, private sector executives communicated quickly; they were decisive when making decisions and they focused on the bottom line. Success for private-sector leaders is the result of an entrepreneurial spirit, a diligent climb up the rough and tumble corporate ladder, determination, and sometimes a dose of good luck. Great leaders have a unique combination of cheer and direct no-nonsense focus. They are upbeat, creative, and will fire a consulting firm in a heartbeat if tangible profits are not achieved as a direct outcome of the service.

The Federal managers with whom the author met in his early consulting days were also bright, and dedicated to their agency’s missions. But the challenges they faced – decision-making, strategy, operations, budgets, Congressional oversight, new legislation and regulations - were often more complex than those faced in the private sector where corporate profitability provides a clear focus. This in part explains why it is so difficult for Federal leaders to make progress and for change happen in Federal organizations?

To understand the difficulty Federal leaders

face when instituting change in their organizations it is necessary to explain what factors established at America's founding, place limits on the way our Federal government works. These factors will offer an explanation as to why it is difficult implement change in the Federal government organizations. Stated in the terms of questions that might be used by behavioral scientists that study organizational dynamics, what forces limit efficient process and speed of action in government organizations and what are the forces for and the forces against government change and transformation? The answer in part is due to the way our founders established the form of governing in the U.S. Constitution. Our government's was designed from the outset to be deliberative, attribute that contributes to making government change difficult to achieve.

What Is Change and Transformation?

When discussing transformation and change in the context of this paper the author is taking a broad rather than narrow view of these concepts. Transformation is defined (Merriam-Webster.com) as "a complete or major change in someone's or something's appearance, form, etc." To transform is to "to change something (completely) and usually in a good way" or to "change in character or condition" and synonyms are to alter, convert or revamp. Change is defined as (Merriam-Webster.com) as "to become different in some particular way" make "radically different" or "to shift" or "undergo a modification." Synonyms included to modify, adjust, or transition.

One might best conceptualize transformation and change as existing on a continuum and as operating at several levels. Transformation implies a radical change. One might visualize these as axes, with transformation and change on a horizontal (x) axis while the size of the institution impacted could be depicted on a vertical (y) axis. For instance, a particular change could impact a region of the globe, a nation, an agency, a particular citizen stakeholder group, or a work group at the low-

est level. The case examples that are used later in this paper cover a broad representation of these, but would generally tend to illustrate major changes that impact a few stakeholder groups.

II. The Role of the Nation State and Inherent Constitutional Challenges to Rapid Change

In order to create effective government transformation, one must first understand the proper role of government in the nation state. The founding fathers' view of the state is a social contract between citizens and the government, which provides national security and the essential goods and services that the private sector cannot provide for itself. The Constitution is unique to America's founding. In order to understand what the framers of the Constitution had in mind, one must first understand the proper role of the nation state.

The Nation State

Thomas Hobbes, as cited by Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2011) provides a useful, if dark, vision of the state as a social contract that our founders would appreciate,

"The basic social "deal" underlying the state (is): in return for giving up the right to do whatever one pleases, the state (or Leviathan) through its monopoly on force guarantees each citizen basic security. The state can provide other kinds of public goods as well, like property rights, roads, currency, uniform weights and measures, and external defense, which citizens cannot obtain on their own. In return, citizens give the state the right to tax, conscripts, and otherwise demand things of them." (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 82)

From an anthropological perspective, the nation state, as compared to earlier social units (the family and tribe) is, "by contrast ... coercive, domineering, and hierarchical, which is why Friederich Nietzsche (as cited by Fukuyama, 2011, p. 82) called the state the "coldest of all cold monsters." At America's founding,

rights were not conferred by a king or parliament but by the Constitution and these are rights “immune to revocation.” (Podhoretz, 2012, p.2)

From a financial standpoint, an effective nation state provides just governance under the rule of law, which provides conditions under which creativity can be fostered. Under these circumstances the collective revenues can be used to improve human capital, build infrastructure, and provide for defense. Some economists, such as Andrew Leith, would contend that balanced revenues and rule of law foster an environment that leads to technological advancement and an expanding economy. (Leith, 2015)

Mistrust of Corrupting Influences

Our founders purposefully designed conflict into the Federal government, through the Constitution, so as to provide checks and balances among the branches of government. In order to ensure that God-given rights were immune to revocation, the founders designed a government that avoided concentrated power because they realized that concentration of power led to corruption. In 1784, in support of a republican form of government, Thomas Jefferson (as cited by Peden, 2000) wrote:

“In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree.” (Peden, 2000)

George Washington words reflected this understanding when writing to John Jay about the flaws of human nature and their impact on the Articles of Confederation. In August of 1798 he wrote:

“We have errors to correct; we have probably had too good an opinion of human nature in forming our confederation. Experience has

taught us, that men will not adopt and carry into execution measures the best calculated for their own good, without the intervention of a coercive power. I do not conceive we can exist long as a nation without having lodged somewhere a power, which will pervade the whole Union in as energetic a manner, as the authority of the State Governments extends over the several States.” (Washington, 1798)

The three branches of Federal government have functions, defined in the Constitution, that are to some extent overlapping. The result is that each branch constantly vies for dominance and has its own interest and agenda. This creates messiness in the process even during the best of times. The legislature creates laws, but relies on the executive branch to implement them and to faithfully carry them out. For example, the President is Commander-in-Chief, but only the House of Representatives can raise revenues in the form of taxes. James Madison argued persuasively in Federalist Number 47 that a separation of powers was essential to good governance.

“The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.” (Madison, 1788)

There is much grouching about the current era’s lack of cooperation among the three branches of government. But when a legislative process runs swiftly, as is the case in times of emergency, it can sometimes lead to a lack of full deliberation resulting in poorly vetted statutes with far-reaching, sometimes unintended, consequences. Some have argued that the laws rushed through Congress following 9/11 have led to some of the very issues in privacy Congress is now trying to remedy.

This lack of concentration of powers can lead to a lack of accountability for failures. President Theodore Roosevelt made an interesting point on how a separation of powers leads to problematic government, in his 1908 State of the Union address when he stated,

“The danger to American democracy lies not in the least in the concentration of administrative power in responsible and accountable hands. It lies in having the power insufficiently concentrated, so that no one can be held responsible to the people for its use. Concentrated power is palpable, visible, responsible, easily reached, quickly held to account.” (Roosevelt, 1908)

Roosevelt was arguing, of course, for power in the executive that he controlled. At the same time, there is wisdom in this statement because diffused responsibility for successes or failures makes it more difficult for the public to understand who is responsible.

Resourcing the Nation’s Needs

Providing and investing resources is done differently in the private and public sectors. In the private sector resourcing is more straightforward. In the Federal government, the responsibility for obtaining and deploying capital is shared between the executive and legislative branches. The President can propose a budget, but only Congress can appropriate money, and all appropriations bills must originate in the House of Representatives. Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution states,

“No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law; and a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money shall be published from time to time.” (Cornell, n.d.)

The President’s capacity for leadership in relationship to Congress depends on his or her reputation, skills in communicating with the public, and ability to successfully build coalitions. (Rosati & Scott, 2011, p. 72-3.) Though he or she can veto legislation, it is in his or her best interest to influence laws in advance, as they are being prepared.

There are a number of unique features in the legislative process, ones that are seemingly laborious but absolutely essential to proper representation of “the governed.” The key processes involve legislative deliberation on

policy as well as oversight of how appropriations are made and laws implemented.

Non-Defense Examples

The following section covers non-Defense case study examples. Although there are few examples, this reflects practical limitations of space without diminishing the lessons to be drawn.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration Compliance. Challenges to worker safety led to creative thinking in the Clinton administration, and an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) program for workplace safety training led to a change in the way the agency works with employers and reduced injuries and illnesses. Amidst the rush to serve the public interest the work of an agency can sometimes overtake the underlying purpose for which it was established in the first place. Created in 1970 by President Nixon, the OSHA is mandated to help establish standards and protect the nation’s one hundred plus million workers. Over its first two decades the agency began to develop a reputation for a culture that rewarded its workers for racking up enforcement actions over its core mission, ensuring safe working conditions. Clinton Administration Assistant Secretary Joseph Dear reported to Congress that employers were complaining bitterly that OSHA was less concerned about worker safety than it was about “inflexible punishment.” (Syverson, 2013) Dear initiated the idea of working with company safety committees, trade associations, and expert safety consultants to shift the culture from a focus on punishment to one focused on safety enhancement.

The concept of working with stakeholders was expanded in the next administration under Assistant Secretary John Henshaw, and later under Assistant Secretary Ed Foulke, both with whom the author worked while he served at the Department of Labor in the early 2000’s. Henshaw enhanced the decades old OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP), an effort to recognize best-in-class compa-

nies for their workforce safety culture and records. By 2003 the program implementation was resulting in a 52 percent lower rate of lost workday incidents from the 2001 baseline as a result of extending and expanding the Clinton-era partnership model. This model, which had begun with Vice President's Gore's "reinventing government" plan gave OSHA officials a new opportunity to communicate with employers, the public, and interest groups.

The VPP program was incorporated as a core feature within OSHA's 2003 Five-Year Strategic Plan amidst the Department of Labor's initiative to streamline OSHA's structure. This burning platform to save costs and streamline effort providentially became the mechanism for making a transformation possible. OSHA continued to execute strict enforcement mechanisms, but within the new approach employers were given a week to resolve a complaint and an illegal condition was eliminated. In addition to inspections, OSHA staff focused more on compliance assistance that trained employers to focus on doing the right thing from the beginning. In addition to enforcement inspections, a new focus was to reach more employers and industry groups through outreach and training. While the enforcement mechanisms remained and were by no means diminished, the non-enforcement programs reached a larger stakeholder network. Compliance assistance ramped up during this period as did OSHA's use of data for enforcement.

A core feature of the strategic plan was to focus on performance metrics. Both Hinshaw and Foulke were strong proponents of employing a balanced set of metrics to focus the organization and employees on measuring and tracking progress toward goals. Hinshaw stated,

"We have to stay focused and on target. We have to be results oriented, not activities oriented. We have to measure how effective we are on an ongoing basis, so we can fine tune our process to get the maximum impact for the resources we have, then evaluate how we've

done." (Syverson, 2013)

Government organizations are often criticized for focusing on process instead of results. Given that agencies receive criticism in the press from Congress in its oversight role and General Accountability Office reports it is not surprising that agency leaders would feel stretched. Having a core set of integrated metrics helps the agency focus on the most meaningful things instead of losing focus. In this case, improving the bottom line of worker safety served as a unifying goal.

This case demonstrates a number of attributes in a change program which Federal leaders can employ to overcome the forces against change, helping to transform the organization in a way that better serves the public and engages employees. In this OSHA example, the agency leadership carried over a promising program from the previous administration. Where politics might make it easier to scrap the program and focus on something entirely indifferent, it was instead enhanced. A second feature of this agency program was that its leaders shifted the focus from punishment to education and training in order to meet the core mission. A final feature, and a lesson for other leaders attempting to change the organization is that they used a strategic plan with a set of integrated metrics on which they focused to increase worker safety.

Recovery Act Transparency

At the time when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Public Law 111-9) was passed in early 2009, America was in the midst of the Great Recession. The Obama Administration, beginning with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), developed an overarching "ethics infrastructure" that simplified the process for capturing cost and performance data. This made it possible to ensure integrity throughout the period of the effort.

Also known as the "Stimulus" or "Recovery Act," the legislation in ARRA aimed to save or create jobs through funding a wide variety of

programs such as infrastructure and education. The ethics infrastructure was composed of representatives drawn from OMB, the President's Economic Advisory Recovery Board, a Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board (RATB), state representatives, and major grantees to bring transparency to \$840 billion in spending. President Obama named Interior's Inspector General Earl Devaney to establish RATB, whose mission was to provide transparency of ARRA-related funds and to detect and prevent fraud, waste, and mismanagement of those funds. The overall ethics infrastructure carried out successful administration of the Act and avoided the kind of scandal associated with fraud and waste that can sometimes accompany rapid expenditure. Moreover, the ethics infrastructure ensured a new, much higher level of transparency than had been the case in the past.

The program established a web-based portal where agencies and recipients reported in centrally on their ARRA expenditures. The detailed and standardized information format enabled the sort of transparency that had been envisioned in the 2006 Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (Public Law 109-282), an act aimed at holding government accountable for spending decisions and reducing waste. (Pasquantino, 2015) According to Wood and Siempelkamp (2010) report that,

To implement its mission of transparency and accountability, the (organization) created two game-changing systems –Recovery.gov and FederalReporting.gov – that have reformed the standards and transformed government and transparency as well as risk assessment and accountability for federal spending. ... From October 1 through October 10, 2009, for the first time in the history of government, recipients of federal awards publicly reported on the money they received. (Wood and Siempelkamp, 2010, p.3)

Successful implementation by resulted in several transformative Federal and state achievements. First, it developed and de-

ployed technology-based reporting portal that showed transparency could be achieved. Second, the success of the endeavor inspired many states to implement their own new portals for transparency reporting. (Pasquantino, 2015). Third, the ethical infrastructure and transparency board paved the way for the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-101). If anything, this case demonstrates that a determined team can deploy policy and technical solutions that bring new transparency to government spending, and by doing so, increase trust in the government. Even the vocal critics of ARRA in the Congress applauded the new level of transparency.

This section has reviewed a number of case examples demonstrating, despite the forces against change noted in prior sections, that it is possible for effective leaders to implement transformation within the Federal context. The next section will discuss some of the lessons learned, some of which were discussed within these case examples.

3. Principles for Transformation and Managing Public-Sector Change

Thus far this paper has reviewed in depth the forces that make it difficult to make change and transformation possible. On the other hand it has also provided some case examples of the many instances where major change was achieved despite the challenges. This final section explores principles that public-sector leaders can apply in their day-to-day work to make government transformation and change possible. The recommendations could be applied by elected officials or appointees at the start of their tenure, but it is aimed primarily at career senior-level and program managers who have responsibility for making their organization work. Many of the challenges begin with the nature of the legislative process, and "threading the needle" to make change happen in agencies requires inspiring leaders. The section begins by describing "kludgeocra-

cy,” an overarching term that summarizes the challenges of getting the outcomes the public seeks through policy and programs. It then shifts to ways to help make transformation and change possible, even in the face of difficulties. This portion is divided into three sections related to who are effective leaders, what effective leaders do, and how effective leaders shape the organization. The categories are not mutually exclusive and the concepts overlap to some degree.

Kludgeocracy

Steven Teles, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University who is interested in the interaction of policy and organizational change, provides a handy overarching concept to many of the difficulties encountered in Federal policy and programs described throughout this paper. (Teles, n.d.) He uses the term “kludgeocracy” to describe the current state of government policy and programs, when the fundamental policy mechanism is substantially more complicated than the problem it is trying to solve. (Klein, 2013) Kludge, a term drawn from coding, is “an inelegant patch put in place to solve an unexpected problem and designed to be backward-compatible with the rest of an existing system. (Teles, 2013, p. 98) Teles argues that the complexity of government rather than its size is the greatest challenge, with government practices hiding “from view the tendency of public policy to redistribute resources upward to the wealthy and organized at the expense of the poorer and less organized.” (Teles, 2013, p.97)

The costs built into programs due to kludgeocracy are often “hidden, indirect, and ... corrupt the distribution of its costs” so that many of the outcomes are disconnected with the original intent. (Teles, 2013, p. 98) A fitting example was confusion during Hurricane Katrina about which agency (Federal or local) should be responsible for New Orleans’ levees. Policy complexity and extracting rents make it difficult to understand who benefits and who pays. Complexity obscures what is intended.

(Klein, 2013). This leads to loss of public trust and a corrosive political process that seeks to find backdoor avenues to advance hidden interests.

The next subsections reflect lessons learned to make effective transformation and change possible in the Federal context, that is, ways in which to build successes that overcome kludgeocracy.

What Makes a Great Leader

Regardless of the challenges – Constitutional, evolutionary, or kludgeocracy – there are means by which effective leaders can help achieve transformation and change. The following sub-sections outline principles that leaders can employ in government to make change possible. This subsection focuses on the nature of leaders themselves, their attributes and how they communicate.

Optimism. Effective leaders in government service need to be optimistic. That is not to say they are unrealistic and unaware of risks. There is a Marine saying that, “Hope is not a COA (course of action).” On the other hand, if a leaders’ frame of mind is cynical from the outset then small barriers add up quickly and can lead to defeat. For example, Ed Gamache, the director of a Veterans Affairs Medical Center faced steep challenges when initiating one of the VA’s first reengineering efforts, changing the way in which the hospital operated. The medical chief of staff, a powerful and forceful figure, was initially opposed to this initiative. Ed optimistically pressed for system changes, focusing on improving care for veterans, even though many forces were organized against making the transformation. Ed held the key staff responsible for selecting and tracking quality care metrics, relentlessly but positively pointing out the advances that were being made. In the end, Ed prevailed and the initiative proved successful. The chief of staff left the VA system to head up an even larger reengineering at one of the nation’s largest medical centers. As was noted in the OSHA and PEPFAR examples, a positive face at the

outset, as well as maintaining a positive outlook is an important characteristic of leaders responsible for instituting transformation. Maintaining optimism in the face of critics and the inevitable setbacks is a choice.

Mission Focus. Private sector leaders have an advantage in their ability to make speedy decisions when compared to government organizations. In the private sector there is a clear bottom line – to make profit. In the public sector leaders must serve broader objectives and stakeholders. In the private sector an organization is profitable or not, and the profit forecast against competitors provides a clear point of comparison to check if a company is moving in the right direction. The investing public rewards the more profitable companies. The absence of a similar bottom line in the public sector can make it more challenging for its leaders to maintain focus. Achieving the mission serves as an effective proxy for profit, and prudent Federal leaders focus the organization's workers on a clearly communicated mission. In many Federal agency situations, the mission can be so broad and the constituency it serves so diffuse, that it creates confusion in the workforce about priorities. An effective leader creates clarity about their understanding of the mission in ways that people can easily understand and on which they can focus their energies.

Creating Necessity. In the private sector, it typically is necessary to use what John Kotter, a noted expert on change management, calls a “burning platform” to create a sense of urgency for change and transformation. (Kotter & Cohen, 2002) (Kotter, 2007) In the private sector, especially in companies whose business models rely on shifting technologies, creating a sense of urgency for change may mean the difference between great success and bankruptcy. In the public sector agencies may shift but they are rarely if ever eliminated.

Nevertheless, it is possible for skilled Federal leaders to create a sense of urgency. This involves a more subtle and consistent form of communication than for the private sector.

Public sector jobs are rarely eliminated, so it is important to capture people's imagination about what is possible, linking the mission with people's actions each day. For instance, while the VBA backlog created frustration on the part of both veterans and the VA workforce, General Hickey worked with multiple stakeholders to communicate that it was possible to tackle this challenging issue and to better serve veterans. Likewise, successive Secretaries of Defense have communicated with operations personnel about the importance of achieving auditability to reassure the public that its funds are being spent as intended.

Leadership Activities

Strategy, Goals and Metrics. Having a well-integrated strategy and supporting metrics can play an important role in the success of a private enterprise. Building a strategy forces leadership to look at the organization from a different standpoint and come to a shared understanding, while metrics serve as guideposts against which to measure progress against one's plan. These activities are essential in the realm of national defense.

Some essential core references for these exercises include Porter (Porter, 1980) for strategy and Kaplan and Norton (Kaplan & Norton 1993) (Kaplan & Norton 1996a) (Kaplan & Norton 1996b) for metrics. Mea (Mea et al, 2002) provides a useful summary for these. The lesser-known but highly useful Ascher and Overholt (Ascher & Overholt, 1983) approach to strategy provides a more robust extension of Porter's work.

This paper cannot explain the strategic process within the space provided, but it can be summarized as follows. Strategy begins with an assessment of the environment, including a clarification of the core mission (or core business) with an unvarnished assessment of the environment and or organizational capabilities. The next step involves forecasting trends to assess where the environment will be at some point in the future ten or more years out. The following step involves clarifying potential

environments – from those that are favorable to the ones where exogenous contingencies may even threaten the existence of the organization. Having detailed out environments with the associated risks and opportunities, the next steps involve creating goals and supportive integrated and balanced metrics. The metrics serve as signposts to clarify progress toward the goals.

Setting realistic goals is an essential element in strategic planning. Private sector organizations generally have much clearer, easier to measure goals with well-defined timeframes. In practice, goal setting in government-related entities often tends to be less quantitative, more social or political environment oriented and heavily qualitative in nature. This makes it harder to establish highly measureable goals with clear timelines for expected outcomes.

A key role for leaders in the strategic planning process is to set demanding, yet realistic goals. (Handlon, 2015) Creating overly lofty visions can result in goals that are too diffuse and accompanying metrics that are both hard to measure and impractical. Shooting for the stars is laudable, but goals need to be practical and achievable. A strategy, its goals, and its associated metrics need to be clear, attainable, measurable (i.e., have simple metrics), and integrated (i.e., support each other). Once defined, the goal attainment needs to be measured at the right intervals in order to drive accountability in operations. Execution of long-term strategic plans and goals in private sector organizations are routinely driven by day-to-day operational execution details synchronized across the organization. (Eicher, 2006) In the private sector, multiple small groups of people are aligned against a clear mission, detailed execution activities are defined, and results are measured in reported outcomes to the top leaders and the board.

The first PEPFAR coordinator, a former pharmaceutical executive, exhibited strong command of these concepts. He worked with his leadership to develop a strategy they owned and that was clearly tied to goal attainment.

Programs and projects that did not demonstrate a clear and direct link to well-defined outcomes were dropped. When members of Congress attempted to support alternative district-sponsored programs with indirect links or of lesser quality, he convincingly engaged with them to clarify the issues. Because the strategy employed clearly defined outcome metrics, he was able to demonstrate with precision when programs favored by members would result in sub-par performance. The relationship he developed with legislators was always upbeat and convincing. Rather than argue, he convincingly used data to make the argument, letting Congress decide. OSHA's strategy also demonstrated similar characteristics in that it employed well-balanced and integrated metrics focused strictly on safety outcomes.

Diagnosis. Effective leaders are always taking the temperature of their organization, and they do so in many ways. This challenge is greatest if one is new to a Federal organization. For those who have come from a high-paced bottom-line private sector position, there is a temptation to launch into a specific direction without appropriately understanding the nature of the organization – its strengths and weaknesses, the styles of interaction, and where the sources of influence are. While a new leader may have specific agenda items he or she wants to accomplish, the wise leader initially communicates that he or she will take a reasonable period of time (a “listening tour” of perhaps 45 to 60 days) in which to learn and form an assessment, to keep from drawing hasty conclusions. This approach provides the staff with the assurance that the new leader will listen to what they have to say, giving them an opportunity to speak with enthusiasm about the work they have accomplished in the past and to express their hopes and desires for the future.

In the private sector, hires at an executive (C-level) or director level would be expected to have a specific agenda of accomplishments for the near term and longer term, and staff might

feel rudderless if the new incumbent did not communicate that clearly from the outset. In the public sector, at a sub-cabinet level position, the intent would be communicated with the cabinet secretary, but in order to earn the trust of agency staff it is critical to be in a “listening mode” at the beginning in order to earn trust. The failure to act this way can be, “like laying your own landmines” in the public sector, because in government change comes slowly.

In a business context, measuring change begins with clearly defining today’s “current state.” This means defining the current situation, and how things work together to achieve the outcomes today. Defining the current state includes detailed documentation of the current processes, people, technology, financials, quantitative and qualitative measures, outcomes, policies, communications, and products and services to be delivered to customers. This can be part of the activity for the initial “listening period” in a public services organization as well. After one has completed the initial listening tour and formulated a strategy, it is appropriate to formulate a “future state” of desired end-results. Both in the private and public sector this describes future desired outcomes, new and refined processes, technology enablement, economic outcomes, quantitative and qualitative measures, and a host of new or refined support systems needed for new desired outcomes.

One of the best guides to the process of diagnosing public sector agency situations is available in the Peter Daly and Michael Watkins (Daly & Watkins, 2006) book, *The First 90 Days in Government*. The authors categorize situations into four groups. Turnarounds, the first grouping, involve situations in which an organization has disturbing performance deficiencies that need to be resolved. The second grouping, realignment, involves less difficult situations in which the organization is meeting its mission in part, but structural or resource allocation issues sub-optimize efficiency or consistent results. Sustainment situ-

ations, the next grouping, is one in which the organization is performing near peak, and is an enviable position in which to be. However, even high-performing public sector organizations experience some drift and it is difficult to lead even high-performing organizations when they must adapt to additional constraints, regulations, tightening budgets, or new resource challenges. The fourth grouping, start-up situations, are rare in government and they offer the unique situation in designing the organization and its business processes. PEPFAR was a unique start-up case in which the coordinator could assert control over AIDS resources regardless of the agency.

Technology Implementation & Process Redesign. In both the private sector and in the public sector, major technology implementations are means by which to achieve significant transformations. Both sectors struggle to be effective, and the cost of failure is high but the rewards for a successful technology implementation can be huge. Information technology implementation projects within the government represent a somewhat unique situation, one that can speed change while transforming the way business is conducted. One of the unique features of transformations in government in the past few decades has been the degree to which many of these transformations depended on an accompanying systems implementation. Systems implementations are all about adding new technology into existing business processes in order to achieve dramatically improved mission accomplishment. That is, they automate and smooth out the processes to free up people for more productive uses of their energy. Systems implementations should be viewed within the strategy as an “enabling” initiative for a larger purpose. Technology in this case is a means, or a pathway, to refine business operating processes while employing new technologies to achieve goals like “cheaper, faster, better, more effective” services for government customers.

Systems implementations not only change the technologies employed; they change how

people do things, and how the new processes will work. Thus, the four critical factors, all equally weighted, that make the difference in any successful systems implementation are: people, processes, technology, and outcomes, with goals and results that must be defined more clearly.

How Leaders Shape the Organization

Engaging Stakeholders. If any transformation or change effort is to be successful it must engage with the key stakeholders. Stakeholders are those individuals and groups with an interest in or who will be affected by the change. Even if one is undertaking a straightforward technology initiative in the private sector, such as an enterprise resource plan (ERP), it is necessary to engage with and gain the support of stakeholders within the organization (e.g., executives, operations managers, and impacted workforces, etc.) as well as allied stakeholders (board of directors, financial analysts, suppliers, and sales channels).

In the context of Federal sector agencies, engaging external and internal stakeholders is of even greater importance. (Ostroff, 2006) In the process of designing any transformative program, reaching out to and engaging with Congress is of highest importance. A slow and deliberative process may appear ponderous, but failure to get all viewpoints represented or to get the support of legislators can lead to a backlash and undermine a program's implementation. As noted in the PEPFAR example, the coordinator worked closely with Congress to make the case for permitting only the best programs to be funded. In preparing Goldwater-Nichols, key Congressional staff members worked closely with military leaders to seek wider support for the resulting reorganization.

Engaging with internal stakeholders should also be a high priority when seeking a major program change. Government staff members often stay in their organization for a long time, sometimes for an entire career. (Ostroff, 2006) Long-term Federal employees develop an intuitive sense of how to get things done in their

culture – what will work and what will not – and gaining their trust and their input can be an essential factor in creating success. This was the approach used at OSHA, bringing in employees for the design of its reengineering to make sure that their knowledge was tapped. This helped make the changes successful and helped to detect any potential landmines in advance of implementation. Bringing in the team may seem to slow down forward progress, but unless a leader builds trust and emotional commitment, programs tend to fail.

One of the more creative stakeholder interventions the author has observed was when a vice president (VP) at a ship manufacturer formed a group of the most vocal critics of a reengineering effort, calling them the “Grumpy’s Grippers Team” – named after the most vocal critic. The VP first charged the group with the mission interviewing and analyzing the organization to fully discover problems with the proposed effort. After the team reported back, the VP charged the team with selecting three issues they cared about and coming up with a plan to resolve those issues. As a result of the experience, the team members became known as the most vocal in detecting culture issues and the most creative in overcoming barriers. The author observed a similar approach in government when a chief financial officer put the most vocal critic of a new accounting project in charge of its success, promising a step raise if the person was successful. It worked.

Understanding One’s Team. Some experienced Federal managers would assert that the most important relationship they have is upward. Some very successful managers simulate a refined obsequiousness in an effort to draw in their leader in order to shape what they believe are the best outcomes. This author would contend, on the other hand, that the most important relationship that a public-sector leader has is with those who report to him or her. The soul of leadership is having a clear vision for the results to be achieved, and the heart of leadership is to understand the people one leads in a way that can help them

achieve the goals of the organization. Since goals cannot be accomplished without people resources, effective leaders give their team credit for their accomplishments. Nothing is more deflating, and negative, than a boss taking credit for what someone else did, without giving proper recognition to the persons who accomplished the important end-results.

Assuming that the primary relationship for achieving success is with one's direct reports, understanding the personality of each and what motivates them is essential. The psychology literature shows that there are essentially eight different normal personality styles, and that interacting with them calls for different interpersonal approaches that respond to their unique need. (Millon & Everly, 1985) The table below summarizes these personality subtypes. (Mea, 2015) Elaborating on the managerial tactics for interacting with each type is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is not surprising that each has unique needs. Furthermore, the complexity of balancing the relationship of each to the other types calls for great insight and sensitivity.

Both in the private and public sectors, one of the key roles of great leaders is that of mentoring. Much has been made in literature of the past decade regarding the idea that great leaders were themselves mentored. Leaders who help others around them succeed and improve every day are more respected and admired by the teams they lead. It may not be realistically possible to mentor multiple people, but lead-

ers obtain greater loyalty when development and coaching is a priority. Some management experts assert that the social obligations of a leader go beyond merely achieving excellent group outcomes. For leaders there is a moral obligation to make each person perform better as an individual and within the collective group. This prepares them for a next higher level of responsibility. The practice is woven within the fabric of the U.S. military, where training and education is part of the core mission. Preparation for joint coordination and operations is codified in Goldwater-Nichols and in military doctrine. Some corporations are nearly as committed to development as the U.S. military, and as the State Department found under General Colin Powell, it is a powerful model for other agencies to consider.

Working Within the Culture. Mature leaders understand how to work within the parameters of the organization in which they have to work. Every business or public sector organization has a unique culture that has evolved to cope with the challenges its meets. Private sector entities are more dynamic as they need to adapt to the marketplace as a condition for survival. High tech and small firms are noteworthy for cultures that value innovation and speed of execution. Government cultures typically, on the other hand, have multiple constituencies to serve and the need to provide stable, predictable service.

The Federal culture required to support steady but not earth-shattering results oper-

Type	Description of Characteristics
Forceful	Forceful assertiveness in the pursuit of goals.
Sociable	Dramatic and animated with a tendency to be charming but sometimes shallow.
Sensitive	Unpredictable and erratic with pessimism and sense of being unappreciated.
Inhibited	Organized and interpersonally courteous and reliable, but with emotions held in check.
Confident	Poised and confident with flexible thinking, but sometimes lacking thoughtfulness.
Cooperative	Docile, thoughtful and compliant with others; open to others but sense of personal weakness.
Respectful	Shy and interpersonally cautious, often with a sense of being alone.
Introversive	Passive and unobtrusive with a hidden emotional expression.

ates with a different set of behavioral norms, tacit assumptions, and values than those of the private sector. (Shein, 1992) New leaders in government who have previously worked in private sector organizations need to be cautious about rushing into specific agendas without having first taken a pulse of the culture to ensure they understand the rules of the game in which they operate. Sometimes the most important norms for ways in which to conduct operations are hidden below the surface (Egan, 1994).

As noted in the subsection on diagnosis, the prudent manager spends sufficient time to discover and understand the culture. Before one can orchestrate the type of operational implementation that is required for transformation and change, a leader needs to understand the rules of the game if one is to accomplish big goals. Clearly, the State Department leader understood culture in the previously cited Fal-lujah example. In an interesting example that the author observed, a somewhat mistrustful Federal CFO would come late at night to check the kinds of work on people's desk, in order to get a sense of the hidden results. To him, the culture and the rules of the game were as important as the officially reported results. The same CFO informed his managers that he would also be meeting monthly offsite and outside of standard hours with lower level employees to get their view of what was going on behind the scenes. While the approach was initially disconcerting to the managers, it ultimately forced managers themselves to pay attention to the culture and to surface contentious issues with the staff. Ultimately it led to a more open atmosphere and to managers who were more confident.

Measuring Change. One of the chief problems of evaluating whether change has occurred on government projects involves a vexing measurement problem. This is known as the criterion problem in evaluation research. People involved in transformation or change projects frequently conduct pre- and post-intervention assessments, but they fail to rule out

alternative hypotheses to what they assume is change. Real change due to an intervention is referred to as alpha change. Scale recalibration, called beta change, occurs when people change their understanding of what is being measured over the course of time. (Buckley, Mea, Weise, & Carraher, 1998)

Examples might include working group effectiveness or leadership skills. Since these concepts are often abstruse at the beginning of training, it is possible to change one's understanding in a way that changes the measurement itself. Another form of change is called gamma change, which refers to the error of concept redefinition. This occurs when people involved in the change program are exposed to the measurements and they change the way they measure the change in their heads over the course of time. This would be akin to using a ruler that stretches and alternatively shrinks over the course of time. (Buckley, et al, 1998) Just the act of being measured on something creates its own expectations, and it is important for leaders who are invested in a transformation project to make sure that they are candid with themselves about the successes and failures in a transformation program.

From the perspective of experienced management consultants who have worked on both private and public sector projects, two things matter when evaluating the effectiveness of organizational transformations or major change projects – understanding and confidence. Related to understanding, the critical question to ask is if the key stakeholders truly comprehend what is going to be changed and what needs to change. This is fairly straightforward. A related questions is whether stakeholders involved in the transformation have confidence that the appropriate change will be implemented successfully while it is underway. If the answer is no, then this should trigger refining the approach. A related question is do the stakeholders have a measure of confidence that the change is necessary. It is important to establish key timeframes for measuring the change; these are typically at the baseline,

at key milestone intervals, and at the end in order to assess the progress.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This paper examined why achieving major change and transformation in the public sector is difficult, provided examples of success, and discussed principles for making change possible. The nation's founders set up a form of government that makes the process slow and cumbersome. Many of the difficulties have their source in the Constitution; others have their source in unexpected structural factors unique to our nation's development. The conflicting relationship among the branches of government is not a design flaw, and the acrimony we see now is not much worse than at other times in the nation's history.

Even within the context of the many current barriers to transformation and change, much good comes about in government. The paper highlighted a number of Federal case transformation and change examples from Defense and non-security agency successes. Goldwater-Nichols is a prime example of national security legislation that has led to a dramatic transformation in the way Defense organizes and operates. PEPFAR is a prime example of how leadership can make an immense impact on the welfare of an entire at-risk population.

Despite the complexity and hidden difficulties in our "kludgeocracy," much can be achieved. By adopting the best principles and practices to be learned from great leaders, today's public sector leaders can themselves do great work and make great contributions to the nation.

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