

Agency of the Future: Common Misconceptions Holding You Back and How to Break Free



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Introduction

Chances are a manager, senior leader or general counsel has told you what can't be done and what's not possible given current constraints. Maybe you're the bearer of that news.

But what about limiting beliefs — those unwritten rules or assumptions — that aren't found in policy? Or beliefs that have crept into the fabric of your agency because of a misconception? Maybe there's a longstanding belief that you can't manage employees without seeing them in the office or that innovation is too costly, time-consuming or unnecessary.

How do you break free from those misconceptions and help your agency embrace new ways of working and operating in 2021 and beyond?

Who better to answer that question than the government employees in the trenches, doing the work, challenging assumptions and leading from all levels and in both technical and nontechnical roles.

In this guide, we clarify and correct limiting assumptions and common misconceptions often ingrained in agency culture. We specifically highlighted beliefs that are holding employees and organizations back from modernizing and advancing in key areas such as employee experiences, technology, product management, finance and budgeting, and leadership. For each misconception, we explore:

- **What the misconception is and how it's communicated**
- **What's at stake if this way of thinking continues**
- **How to reframe thinking around this issue**
- **Talking points to lead constructive conversations that dispel the misconception**

But before we dig into each of those bullet points, let's take a quick detour to frame the conversations in this report.



Nicole Blake Johnson,
Managing Editor, GovLoop

What's on the Other Side of Red Tape?

To help you get into the right mindset before exploring this report, I'm sharing an online conversation I had with individuals who work in the government community — both public and private sector. I wanted to understand their personal definitions of a common term that sparked my research for this project. I wanted to know how they define "modernization."

I asked:

How do you define modernization in government? I'm not just talking IT or looking for jargon that you'd find in reports. How do you, in your everyday job, think about #modernization in an inclusive way that makes others care about it? This can be keywords or a few sentences.

Their responses were thoughtful, personal and selfless. They confirmed that modernization cannot and should not be relegated to a technology line item in the budget, a new policy, a workforce reorganization or a conference theme. Their responses are reminders of what is on the other side of misconceptions: a more modern and inclusive government that serves all, not some, and that incentivizes creative thinking and empowers employees to courageously cut through that red tape.

Here's a sampling of what they shared (view all comments [here](#)):

Willingness to lead change. "Modernization is an attitude. Am I willing to lead my colleagues and organization to new ways of doing things to serve the public, and am I personally willing to learn new skills to enable that leadership? You can't modernize if you answer 'no' to either of those questions."

-Adam Korengold, analytics professional in government

Employee empowerment. "Getting out of the way of your subordinates; maximizing telework/remote work opportunities; mandatory peer partnership; recognizing exceptional performance over longevity."

-Housing and Urban Development Department employee

Meeting needs. "To me, modernization means becoming fully present to what the current moment requires."

-Jill L. Barrett, Life and Professional Coach, Organizational Consultant

Mindset shift. "Modernization in government is a way of thinking. It's moving away from the mindset that memos and meetings drive good business. It's understanding that building digital tools for employees that prioritize time and outcomes leads to better public tools rather than chasing shiny public services that are on poorly laid foundations. It starts with looking in the mirror for each of us and making a commitment to challenge [our] assumptions."

-Shayne Martin, Director, Office of Communication & Engagement for the Southwestern Region, U.S. Forest Service

User-centered design. "The key is user engagement (user-centered design), but it's tricky because the new methods need to be recognized and be consistent with the processes they will replace, but users may not understand or accept them — which is why they need to be involved in the design and deployment processes."

-Frank L. Greitzer, PhD, Founder and President, PsyberAnalytix

Inclusiveness. "Modernization means involving the voices of those who are working for you now, at all levels, to help shape the policies and programs for the future... allowing feedback, reviews and suggestions along the way from those who matter most. Your internal customers (the workforce) and external customers (people you serve). Modernization = Transformation!"

-Mika Cross, Federal Workplace Expert



Let us know: How do you define modernization in government? What about your constituents? Your manager and agency senior leaders? Share your thoughts with us via [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) or at info@govloop.com.

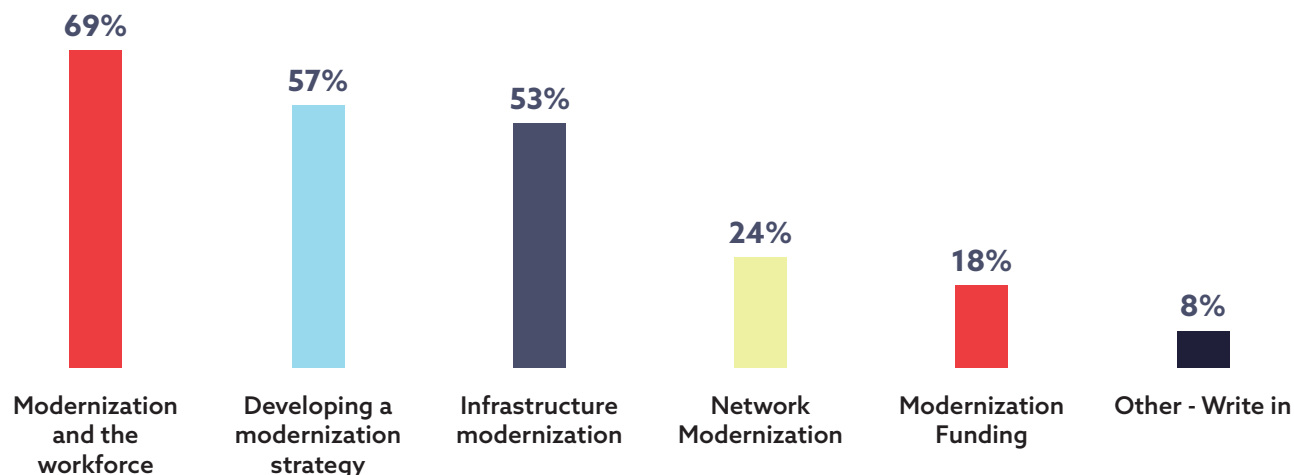
Modernization beyond the executive branch

In October 2020, a bipartisan special committee released nearly [100 recommendations](#) in a final report that serves as a roadmap for modernization in Congress. The goal is to make the more than 230-year-old institution more effective, efficient and transparent. To give you a sense of how this committee defines modernization, here are some of the key issues that the recommendations cover:

- Make the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) a permanent part of the People's House. The 116th Congress authorized the office to recruit, hire, train, develop, advance, promote and retain a diverse congressional workforce.
- Standardize and expand [benefits offered to congressional staff](#), and regularly adjust those benefits to attract and retain top talent.
- Improve the support, resources and tools available to new members of Congress. This includes continuing education and just-in-time learning to help members better retain information.
- Make Capitol Hill, congressional websites and legislative documents [accessible for all Americans](#).
- Increase the quality of [constituent communication](#).

Interested in this topic? Check out the work that [Lorelei Kelly](#) is doing. She leads [modernizing Congress research](#) at Georgetown University's Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation.

In December 2019, we asked the GovLoop community what they are reading and/or wanting to learn more about as it relates to modernizing legacy IT.



Modernizing in a Crisis

5 conditions that boost innovation

So how do you get to the other side of the red tape and lay hold of all the benefits that a modern government can offer?

For many in the public sector, answering that question dramatically shifted from a casual conversation to an absolute necessity in 2020.

Even agencies that already considered themselves innovative were forced — by health, economic and racial equity crises — to think differently, challenge assumptions and act swiftly.

Defaulting to “no” wasn’t an option.

Gradually, the crippling fear of change and failure seems to be losing at least some of its grip on organizations, but rooting out entrenched assumptions can’t be a one-time event or solely crisis-driven if the goal is lasting impact.

Former Sacramento Chief Innovation Officer Louis Stewart offered these words of advice for government workers: “The first best practice is starting from yes. Try not to start from a place where you’re scared to try new things.”

A [November 2020 article in MIT Sloan Management Review](#) explored the answer to a question that we at GovLoop have been documenting in the past year: “Why is it that innovation seems more possible during a crisis?” The writers identified five interdependent conditions that characterize a crisis and boost innovation, based on their work with public and private sector organizations.

1. A crisis provides a sudden and real sense of urgency.

2. This urgency enables organizations to drop all other priorities and focus on a single challenge, reallocating resources as needed.

3. With this singular focus and reallocated resources, it’s now everybody’s job to come together to solve the problem, bringing a new diversity of viewpoints and perspectives.

4. This urgency and singular focus legitimizes what would otherwise constitute “waste,” allowing for more experimentation and learning.

5. Because the crisis is only temporary, the organization can commit to a highly intense effort over a short period of time.

I strongly recommend reading the entire article because it gets to the heart of the deeply rooted issues and biases at play with each of these five conditions. One in particular that resonates is the reality that “people are far more likely to change their behavior to avoid a negative outcome than they are to change behavior to gain a positive outcome,” the authors note. “This phenomenon is known as prospect theory.”

The article also explains how leaders can use what they’ve learned to effectively generate innovation in non-crisis times.

In the following pages, you’ll hear directly from public servants about the common misconceptions they’ve heard throughout their careers and how those limiting beliefs impact modernization*. They also provide talking points to help you change the narrative at your organization and lead change from where you are.

*Interviews were edited for length and clarity.**

Who owns modernization?



An interview with

Brian Whittaker formerly served as Executive Director of 18F and Deputy Director at the IT Centers of Excellence, both of which are housed at the General Services Administration (GSA). Whittaker's background centered on collaborating with agencies and partners to identify and prioritize their modernization initiatives, and to break down what's at stake and view these efforts through a broader lens.

Limiting belief:

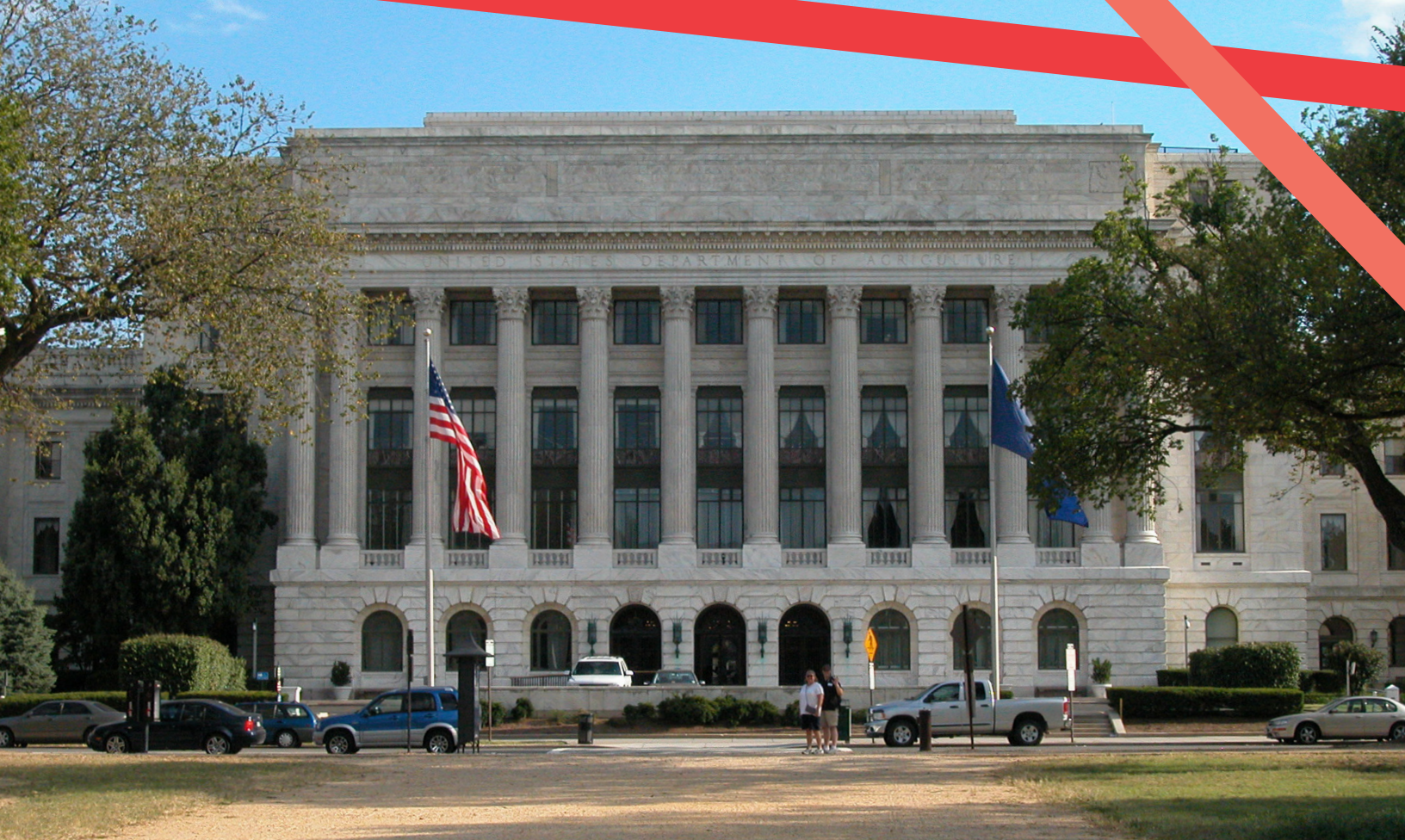
Modernization lies at the doorstep of the chief information officer, and therefore the CIO is solely accountable.

The reality is: It takes many functions across an entire agency and department to make modernization a reality. When the headlines say, "Systems are failing," and you look to your left and your right, who are you going to grab first? It is a natural impulse and a logical thing to call the CIO. But there are also underlying elements like the acquisition process and the human resources (HR) process. There are multiple areas where an IT project can be unsuccessful.

The consequences are steep: Consider the unemployment websites nationwide that were crashing at the start of the COVID crisis. Did the agencies running them acquire the proper tools? Did they have the people to develop the requirements for that tool? Did they have the appropriate skill sets to maintain those tools? A lot of our country is at risk. People aren't able to get their benefits, and haven't been able to for a long time. So we have to come together and understand that this is much broader than an IT problem.

Reframe the conversation: Depending on the agency or department or bureau, I think oversight of modernization should be pivoted to either a chief operating officer or deputy secretary. Those are the people who have oversight of enough groups to collaborate and prioritize.

What's possible: Where I've seen IT modernization be most successful are at USDA [Agriculture Department] and OPM [Office of Personnel Management]. It was really a group of the CIO, the chief human capital officer, the head of acquisition and the program side all coming together to prioritize. At USDA, the secretary had an IT strategy in the form of a memo. When we came in from the Centers of Excellence, there was no confusion about why we were there. We had the memo. Everybody had the memo.



Advice to cut through red tape

For senior leaders: Come up with a mechanism to capture data and perspective, and prioritize where you start. Tap your chief data officer (CDO) and maybe your chief privacy officer and figure out how to implement a voice-of-the-customer tool or even a voice-of-the-employee tool. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. You can hear from them about their burdens and pain points, and you can focus on those.

For aspiring leaders: Modernization's right in front of you. It's an opportunity to improve a process, to get a thing done faster, to delight the general public. Document your hack; document your best practices. Share those with your leaders. It can start with the people on the front line making something as simple as a process improvement that catches on and spreads across the entire bureau or agency.

Recommended reading

The state and federal versions of [de-risking guides](#) by 18F, GSA's digital consultancy group, provide instructions for stakeholders who fund or oversee government technology projects, including budget specialists, product owners and legislators. It walks them through how to budget for, procure and oversee software development projects.

Conducting user research



An interview with

Cyd Harrell is an independent civic design consultant and author of "A Civic Technologist's Practice Guide." Her background is rooted in the user research discipline, and she has also worked in product management. Much of her work focuses on bringing both design and product management practice to people in government who make those kinds of decisions.

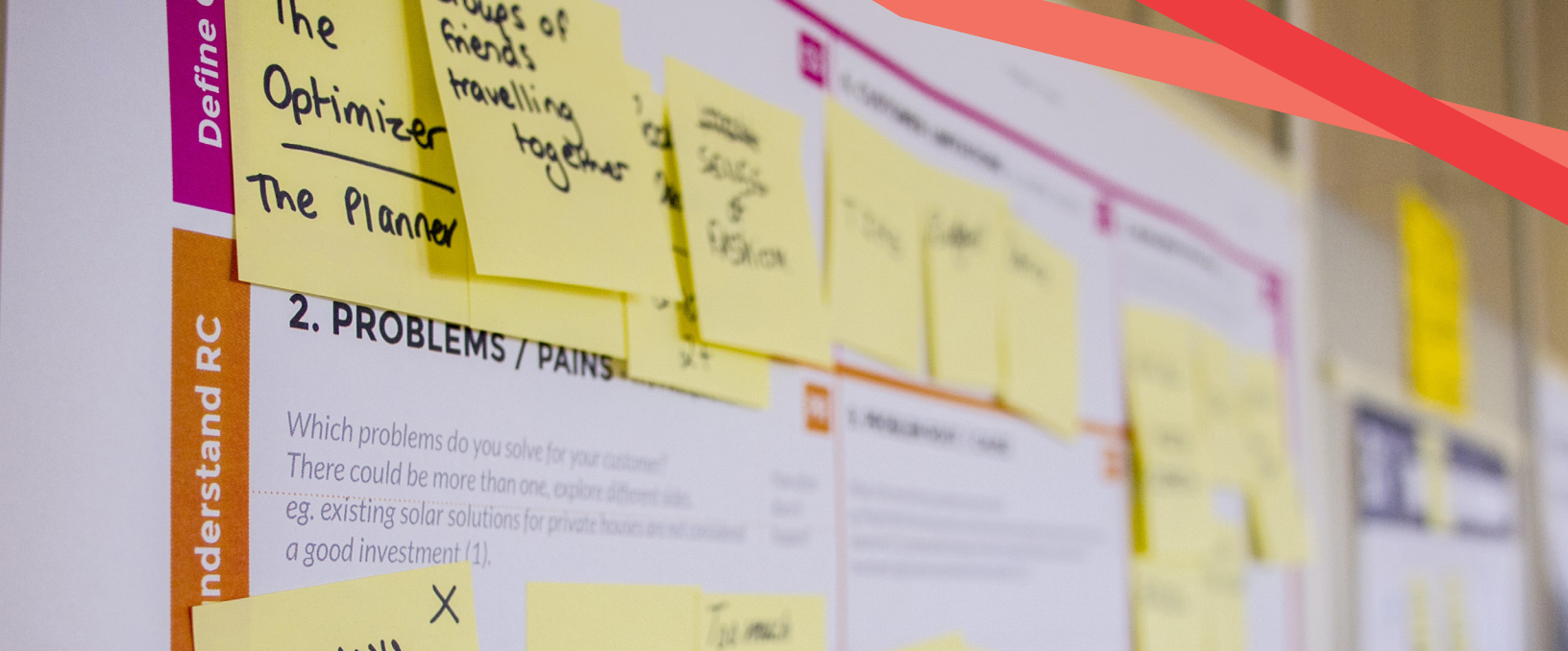
Limiting belief:

We are a government organization and don't think user research is something we can do.

What's at stake: You really miss a connection with your constituents around the service that you're building or providing, and that can lead to a lot of things, including employee discouragement, if people don't see how improvements that they're making affect the actual public, or difficulty in management making decisions because they don't have good information.

What's missing from the conversation: I really believe that everybody who makes design decisions — and you could say the same for product decisions — deserves to have design practice and design communities. There are a lot of public servants making what are actually design decisions: how to present something to the public, how to design a digital product or a digital service. Even people who write communications or signage for use for the public are making design decisions. They have great instincts and a lot of smarts, but may not have had exposure to design practice or design community.

- **Acknowledge the discomfort:** That's a real thing. You may be told information about how your product or service works that is unpleasant, and I think one of the important things to recognize is that if you are in a career government position, you can get in trouble for that. That's a career risk. And so taking that on requires supportive management.
- **Shift your mindset:** It requires a shift sometimes in mindset toward being excited to find out that information and using it to get better. Sometimes there's a political appointee in charge who doesn't understand or who is very rigorous about the way that they evaluate people against goals. The idea of getting bad feedback from the public, which is a pretty universal result of any user research study, is legitimately risky.



Reframe the conversation: What I try to do is make a safe way for them to experience the process and show them the values through doing that. Invite them to do a dry run of your protocol with an alumnus of the organization. In convincing people that it's worth doing research, get really clear on those research questions and show how your research plan leads to getting that valuable answer to those questions.

Talking points to cut through red tape

Communicate your work. Sometimes demonstration sessions are not the first step. Be transparent about your protocols, what questions you're going to ask and how you'll do it, how people can immediately opt out if they don't want to participate in research, how the information is presented to participants, and more.

If you get permission to run a small study, or a big study, share with your broader team at the end of every day what you did. You might say, "Here are some of the interesting things that we found out, and we'll be enlightening this more later."

Keep this in mind

// **The big research question is what you want to know, not what you ask in an interview. In fact, asking your research question directly is often the worst way to learn anything."**

— Mule Design

Hiring and degree requirements



An interview with

Bill Hunt is technology-policy enthusiast who currently works for the U.S. government. Previously, he spent 20 years building award-winning software and teams in the private sector.

Limiting belief:

The most qualified job candidates have degrees.

The reality in government: Writing code is one thing, but you have to know how a product is managed and a project is managed, which are two separate disciplines. In government, you have to understand how budgets work and security requirements, and everything that goes along with it. A classroom isn't going to teach you any of that.

There's hope: NIST (that is, the National Institute of Standards and Technology) finally changed the NICE framework (a set of building blocks for describing cybersecurity work) to eliminate those education requirements that had been there forever. But, unfortunately, a lot of agencies have adopted that framework as-is and haven't made that update yet for their postings for these positions. I rarely, if ever, see any sort of serious technical position in government that doesn't have at least a degree or other comparable requirement in there.

Consequence of inaction: It creates a barrier to entry for people who don't have these degrees. Even if you're saying it's not required, it's that level of expectation. There's been a number of positions that I tried to apply for where there's still a requirement that you have that educational background, just to say that you have the piece of paper. I don't think that that's resulting in better candidates coming in necessarily.

What's at stake: It limits the diversity of your candidate pool. So you're only getting so many viewpoints.

The need for diverse perspectives: If you haven't been in the trenches and seen what it's like to be on the receiving end of these government services, that's a disconnect between you and the mission. The other side of this is that by having a less diverse pool, you're probably going to be far less aware of systematic inequality that you're creating. There's a lack of real knowledge around automation of these systems [such as artificial intelligence and robotic process automation] and the inequalities they build.



A new outlook: At the bare minimum, agencies need to use blind hiring techniques — removing names, email addresses and phone numbers, and education from these resume evaluations. There are some new initiatives that are coming

down the pike that are worth at least thinking about: having experts in whatever the domain is that you're doing the hiring for, particularly around technology, evaluate the candidate, go through the resumes and do the interviews.

Talking points to cut through red tape

For job candidates: Get really comfortable with your impostor syndrome. All of us have it. Even if it doesn't seem like you perfectly fit the requirements, you should still apply, particularly if you're coming from a nontraditional background, not a typical "white man in technology." This is the opportunity where we need your skills, and you should join us and help us.


**Bill Hunt** @krusynth · Nov 9

I see many of my former technology-colleagues now suddenly eager to return to government- or join for the first time- and I'm very excited to work with you all again!




That being said, here are a few thoughts from someone who stuck around for the hard parts over the last 4 years.

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For hiring managers: When it comes to hiring, don't overlook the people that don't necessarily match what you think is the right candidate. Do more actual interviews than just discarding resumes. Double-, triple- and quadruple-check the number of actual in-person, phone and video chats that you're doing with people to get to know them. Do multiple rounds. Because, again, it's the people you're hiring, not the resume.

**Bill Hunt** @krusynth · Dec 11

In short: don't ask questions that have a single, expected answer. If you know what the answer is, you've created a knowledge-based test - and just like with authentication, you've created a bad one. 7/7+

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Budgeting in local government



An interview with

Dan Hoffman is the City Manager for Winchester, Virginia. He has a background in HR and management, with a specialty in using technology to positively impact change. His skill sets complement the strengths of Winchester's deputy city manager, who also serves as the chief financial officer.

Limiting belief:

Jurisdictions' budgets can support deep cuts, therefore they should operate with an austerity mindset.

The reality is: When we sit down with people and actually go through our budget, especially a new elected official, they'll see there's not much there to cut. You might find a little bit here, a little bit there, but you're not going to find double-digit cuts that we might have found back in 2008. A lot of jurisdictions are not in great financial shape. Winchester's very fortunate, but we're going to have to be creative about our revenue sources and not get too over-reliant on federal assistance and CARES [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act] money going into 2021.

Thinking small isn't sustainable: I have always been a fan of the old phrase that austerity is the mother of invention, bootstrapping, the lean startup methodology. That's basically everything I espoused when I was a chief innovation officer: Fail fast, start small, iterate. That's still very true. But the "thinking small" mindset works only until you scale up. At some point, to see a benefit, it has to go to scale. That requires an investment. They can't stay small forever and still reap the reward.

What's at stake: If you take that austerity budget mindset that says, "We don't have it, and I'm not going to ask because the council may be mad at me," you're going to have the status quo. If you're not making the case for the return on that investment, shame on you as a city manager. The city council might tell me no, but when you're a city manager, the worst thing you can do is not have the conversation.



Talking points to cut through red tape

Engaging the public: Many jurisdictions have citizen academies. Ours is called INSIGHT Citizen's Academy. If someone doesn't believe that there is a lean budget, or if they feel like there's waste somewhere, come talk to us. Sit down with us. We're happy to sit down with any resident and talk to them about the budget. Just come with an open mind and come with constructive questions. We've converted a lot of naysayers, through things like INSIGHT Citizen's Academy, who were outspoken critics of ours in the past.

Talking with elected officials: The benefit we have with elected officials is that I think the vast majority of them take the time to sit down and understand. They may not like it. They'll be vocal about it, but at least they'll

understand why. I think as a city manager, that's the goal. I'm not always going to be able to say yes to an elected official or to one of my directors, but at least I need them to feel heard and ensure they understand why I've made that decision. From there, you can have an informed, professional, adult conversation. If you don't even try to make the case, or if you don't try to listen, there's not going to be a lot of trust, and they'll believe that there is waste or that you haven't fully thought through all of the different unseen options.

Sharing project responsibilities



An interview with

Nikki Lee is a Product Manager at 18F. She helps state and federal government agencies build capacity for product management inside their organizations and sort out thorny technical problems.

Limiting belief:

Nontechnical teams in government cannot successfully lead technology projects.

The backstory: There's this myth that government needs to outsource IT mainly because their staff is not capable of leading technology projects. And that results in program staff taking their hands off the steering wheel, and it forces the IT teams, who are often vendors, to figure it out with minimal input. This fear and uncertainty causes people to step away from important work that they ought to be doing.

More on that issue: Technologists like myself haven't done a good enough job being inclusive in the way we talk about our work and in the way that we incorporate other people who maybe aren't as familiar with building software. I put the onus on us as technologists to do a better job of showing that we can explain things in plain language and that there are areas where we need input from nontechnical collaborators.

How limiting beliefs are communicated: You'll hear people say everything ranging from "I can't do IT" or "I don't understand IT" all the way to a really direct "I don't like technology, it's not my area of expertise." And often people will extend that to their team at large and say, "Not only do I personally not feel comfortable with technology, but we as a group don't have technology skills."

Know the warning signs: If you're working in government and the only real contact you have with the vendor after an award is made is about documenting performance, I would say that's a warning sign that you're probably holding back and letting your discomfort guide your distance.



Know the goal: The ultimate thing that you want to be doing is having program staff and IT staff acting like a true team together. And you want to be in a place where you're able to acknowledge that everybody on the team is holding a piece of the bigger picture. The only way that you can guarantee that you'll be building the right thing is if you bring all of those perspectives together.

Understand the why: Your program staff, who is closest to the policy, is going to own the why of a project — the why is this project happening and what difference in the world it's going to make. Your technical staff, who have deep expertise in building software, are going to own the how of the solution. And then the place where you really meet in the middle and have 50/50 ownership is defining what it is that we're going to build together.

Advice to cut through red tape

For technical employees: The conversation needs to be about making our work accessible and making our work understandable and approachable to an audience that isn't super confident and comfortable with technology. Continuously reinforce with your coworkers that you need input from program staff.

For nontechnical employees: Take more strategic ownership of your work. When you're talking to technical staff, help them understand the mission and the program priorities as much as possible. Just like technical folks should be explaining things in plain language, they also need feedback from their nontechnical teammates. Remind yourself: Technology helps us achieve the mission, and so there's no reason that we should be disconnected from technology projects that further our mission.

Digital Modernization and Cost Savings



An interview with

Bryan Shone, PhD, is the Director of Policy, Resources and Analysis in the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Headquarters Department of the Army. In his role with the Army, Shone uses data and analytics to enable informed decision-making to support digital modernization.

Limiting belief:

The primary goal of digital modernization is to reduce costs.

The backstory: When I arrived in the Army, the talking points revolving around cloud computing were focused primarily on how migrating data and applications to the cloud would immediately reduce costs to the Army. As Army senior leaders spoke with industry partners and operators about the potential of moving data and applications to the cloud, the discussion quickly shifted from a simple “lift and shift” of data to reduce costs to the importance of cultivating decision-making at all echelons to improve mission effectiveness and enhance security of our data.

Mixed messages: We conducted a messaging campaign to describe the renewed motives associated with migrating data and applications to the cloud. This shift was reflected in broader federal government discussions pertaining to the transition from Cloud First to Cloud Smart concepts. This has required us to develop a compelling business case that helps the Army enterprise understand that cloud migration is not driven by the desire to reduce costs, but more to improve effectiveness and security.

The reality is: The Army’s digital modernization vision is centered on the concept that data will increasingly be used as the primary ammunition for the future fight. Setting the conditions and establishing the infrastructure to posture the Army for success in this future fight will require investments up front. The Army must reprioritize its existing resources to afford these near-term investments.



Areas for improvement: We need to focus on divesting legacy systems and underperforming programs to free up resources for modernized capabilities. We must analyze software and hardware usage rates and their overall utility, and then prioritize those key enablers in accordance with the Army's priority missions. We must also examine as-a-service models to determine where the Army can leverage industry expertise to deliver more effective and secure solutions.

What's at stake: If we truly want to modernize the Army, difficult decisions will need to be made. Not only are significant amounts of resources at stake, but — more importantly — the effectiveness of our Army is at stake. The effectiveness of our future Army will be directly linked to our ability to maintain decision superiority at echelon.

New way of thinking: For the last 18 months, communications across the Army as it pertains to cloud computing and digital modernization have become much more accurate and consistent. Leaders understand that digital modernization — just like any other critical capability set — will require a reprioritization of resources. The Army is identifying ways to harvest savings through IT category management and IT investment accountability to reallocate resources to our top digital modernization priorities.

Rethinking traditional processes: Digital modernization does not always conform to traditional processes used by the government. For example, upgrading our digital collaboration tools during COVID-19 has required the Army to flex on a monthly basis to the latest technological advancements and customer demands. This required us to leverage Agile acquisition approaches. Digital modernization will always be a continuous process.

Developing the right team: Modernization spans all aspects of an organization. Leaders who are truly committed to propelling modernization expand far beyond chief information officers. In the Army, for example, there is a dedicated command for modernization — Army Futures Command. Also, chief data officers have become more important given the increased reliance on data and analytics.

The bottom line: Modernization — particularly digital modernization — is not solely a cost-savings endeavor. Just as it takes a reprioritization of resources to modernize an aircraft or a tank, it takes a reprioritization of resources to modernize our digital infrastructure. To say that digital modernization is purely a cost-savings initiative is a myth.

Shared personal values



An interview with

Sandra Auchter is the Deputy Associate Director for Capabilities (ADC) at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). ADC has a large portfolio, which includes research and development, innovation activities, the CIO office, and adoption of new technologies supporting geospatial-intelligence requirements. Her portfolio also includes AI, automation and augmentation efforts to better use data across NGA.

Limiting belief:

Leaders at government agencies don't share the same personal values as employees.

The impact: I think where it's limiting is recruiting the tremendous talent that's out there. If there are misperceptions about what we represent, and the fact that they don't see a connection between what's happening within the federal government and the Defense Department, in particular, with their lifestyle, there's less of a chance that people actually want to be a part of government.

The expectation: When I came into NGA 20 years ago, I came in with an understanding that this was a commitment for the rest of my working life. In the past, we would not have felt comfortable saying, "Hey, this is important for me to be involved in my kids' activities " or to do these extracurricular activities/hobbies that are not directly related to work. Employees that are coming in over the last 10 years or so are looking for that balance.

A new perspective: If we're able to accommodate, then we should. I do think that the recent environment with COVID, and not physically being in the SCIFs [or secure rooms] and telework have increased the understanding that there is that level of flexibility.

Communicating the message: Those are values that I think we need to share more and let people know that we can be mindful of all of the things that make you complete as a human being and still be able to serve. We put in long hours; it's not easy work. It can be stressful, but recognize that there's a balance and that you want employees to bring their whole selves to work and, at the same time, to make sure that they're healthy.



Shifting workplace dynamics: We're absolutely doing telework. At the very beginning of the pandemic, we were at 85% telework. This was the first time in my 20 years that I was doing work from home. They used to have our calendars on the classified side, so now I have it on the low side. We had to adjust laptops and computers. The director has been doing town halls. Once a week, he's in touch with the workforce. I think the extent to how much more inclusive things have been, because of the fact that we've been able to work in that unclassified environment, has been tremendous.

Talking points to cut through red tape

Some of the changes that we're anticipating making, we had not even thought of before. We decided they were too hard. We just needed to figure out how to get to yes, if this is something that we value.

Questions to ask: If this is something we value, what are we willing to do to get to that place? What if we were open to being a particular kind of agency that embraces these changes? What must be done to make this possible?



Modernize Government IT

Agility and efficiency are critical for public sector entities. Learn how Okta can help modernize your organization's IT.

- IT and security leaders at government agencies recognize the need to adopt new, often cloud-based technologies to better support and secure their workforces and constituents.
- Decades' worth of legacy technologies as well as bureaucratic processes can constrain adoption and growth.
- Agencies need to consolidate disparate systems, securely adopt cloud services, and provide better experiences for their constituents.

The foundation of a modern IT organization is a modern Identity.

[Learn more](#)



Clarifying 3 Identity and Access Management Myths

An interview with Molly He, Senior Product Marketing Manager, and Rob Forbes, Senior Cloud Architect, Okta, Inc.

Widespread remote work means the security perimeters agencies typically placed around their networks are obsolete. With traditional network perimeters disappearing, government IT personnel are under increasing pressure to mitigate risks and protect their agencies' security.

Enter identity and access management (IAM). IAM frameworks provide agencies with the policies and tools they need to verify the users and systems accessing their networks are trustworthy.

"Identity is not just about protecting people, it is about protecting things like servers that matter to your agency because they are mission-critical," said Molly He, Senior Product Marketing Manager at Okta, Inc., an IAM provider.

Unfortunately, IAM technology is aging across the public sector, and myths abound about modernizing IAM tools.

He and Rob Forbes, Senior Cloud Architect at Okta, Inc., explained away three myths about IAM modernization.

1. Myth: IAM applies only to people

Typically, agencies have associated IAM with verifying users' identities. Going forward, however, IAM will also authenticate the devices and resource endpoints that are essential to agencies. Endpoints are any device that connects to a network remotely, such as laptops or smartphones.

"Think of the broad picture of identities and how they're being used and leveraged," Forbes said of applications, devices and users. "It is the methods and avenues they are taking to access the data."

Subsequently, Forbes recommended agencies consider a single platform for managing access to their networks and identifying the connections across these systems.

2. Myth: More tools ensure more security

Complicated IAM can create security risks for agencies. Reducing the amount of IAM tools agencies govern can help protect their data, He said.

"Having a central point of control is critical," she said. "Right now, identity is fragmented at a lot of federal, state and local organizations. Security is a major threat to business continuity if you don't do it right."

For example, many cybercriminals are not penetrating agencies' cyberdefenses. Instead, many hackers are stealing users' access credentials and menacing agencies' data that way.

3. Myth: Cloud cannot hold data

Forbes suggested that many agencies are unaware of cloud computing's potential for modernizing IAM. Cloud's decentralized, on-demand IT means agencies can scale IAM services as needed.

"Stepping away from the notion that data can't be in the cloud is a mind shift," Forbes said. "Stopping modernization due to that thought process is not productive. It is a competitive disadvantage to be stuck in your own data center if you haven't modernized already."

Ultimately, providers such as Okta, Inc. can help agencies practice IAM intelligently using cloud's affordability and flexibility. Whether in-person or remote, cloud-based IAM can aid agencies with monitoring their networks and the entities traveling on them.

"You're modernizing not just to mitigate security risks or reduce costs," He said. "You're future-proofing by making your technology flexible and inexpensive."

Evaluating team effectiveness



An interview with

Blake Carlton is an Organizational Development and Effectiveness Specialist. He is experienced in process and operations improvement, training and development, innovation, and strategic thinking and planning, both domestically and internationally and across sectors and industries. He improves the outcomes of mission-driven organizations by analyzing their entire system, including their people, processes, and tools/technology and providing recommendations to relevant stakeholders and leadership.

Limiting belief:
Scrutiny of team effectiveness might lead to changes that will make my job obsolete.

The reality: There's the resistance, and I think fear of the unknown. Some people in the government, and even some of the managers, might not really fully understand tools like human-centered design, or they might not really be interested in sitting around for a couple of hours of brainstorming. They have enough on their plates, and they just want to get back to work.

How that fear is expressed: They might say this kind of thing doesn't interest them. They don't want to be put on the spot and asked questions about the work they do. There are a lot of different reasons why people might be resistant. Maybe they feel like they're being investigated to a certain degree, exposed for whatever work they're doing or not doing. Some people may just feel like this is a waste of time. They ask questions like, "Why are we always trying to innovate and change things? Let's just stick with what we've got."

Job security concerns: Then there are concerns that if we shake things up, jobs might become obsolete. For example, if we introduce robotic process automation into our work processes, they're worried that they won't have a job.

The right tool for the job: There are tons of tools that you can use as needed to drive change, such as Lean Six Sigma or Agile. But know how to utilize the circumstances that you're in, consider the work you do, consider the people involved — a people, process and technology approach — and apply the right framework to the system that you're dealing with. Use that approach to best understand how to go about making the changes, innovations and strategic thinking.



Explain the why: The why of change helps people understand why we do what we do and who that actually affects. And then maybe that helps us to be more efficient. It helps us to be more efficient because then we could cut out things that we're doing that we haven't realized we're doing unnecessarily. But, also, it provides

more clarity and empowerment to the staff members. If you have a sense of what you're doing and why you're doing it, it gives you a bit more ownership over your day-to-day work.

Talking points to break through red tape

Identify wrong thinking: I'm a cog in a machine, and as part of my job, I just hit this button every day.

Reframe thinking: I hit this button and there's a reason why I do it. I'm going to suggest to my boss that we hit this button in a different way because hitting it up here takes longer than if I hit it down here.

Result: Now you're participating in the strategic planning of the whole group by making that one suggestion and fully understanding your role.

Be strategic: Be strategic about how you communicate and whom you're communicating with. Set the stage ahead of time when sharing new ideas

3 ways to challenge assumptions

One way to overcome limiting beliefs is by challenging foundational assumptions. It can be uncomfortable, to say the least. But left unchecked, limiting beliefs can support narratives that derail progress, hinder innovation and negatively impact morale.

The Interaction Design Foundation, an online global design school used by industry, government and academia, has a [nifty template for using ideation methods to challenge assumptions](#) related to design, services and problems.

Below we highlight three how-tos from that template with minor modifications.

1. List assumptions.

Remember that everything is a perspective. A one and only "truth" does not exist. Even this statement is a perspective – or a belief.

Typical assumptions include:

- That it is impossible to do something, particularly within constraints such as time and cost
- That something works because of certain rules or conditions
- That people believe, think or need certain things

Take a step back from the challenge you're tackling and ask important questions about the assumptions you have about the product, service or situation you're trying to innovate.

2. Challenge assumptions.

Assume that you can overcome and challenge all assumptions.

- Ask "How could this be not true?" and "What if we could do this twice as well in half the time?"

3. Find ways of making the challenge a reality.

The real challenge is to make it happen in reality, which is why ideation is critical. Asking questions can move you from idea to buy-in from colleagues and even senior leaders.

Many of the assumption-busters you may come up with may seem silly, until you come up with something that really makes the entire team sit up straight and take notice.

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.

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