Government Can Deliver addresses how government agencies, at the federal, state, and local levels, can use modern management practices and better leverage technology to drive significantly improved operational performance.

Government Can Deliver:
A Practitioner's Guide to Improving Agency Effectiveness and Efficiency
By Richard A. Spires

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Government Can Deliver

A Practitioner's Guide to Improving Agency Effectiveness and Efficiency

Richard A. Spires

Richard's book is a must-read for anyone in government service or anyone interested in good governance practices. I've learned a great deal about leadership and integrity over the years watching Richard deliver for the American public at DHS, the IRS, and in other leadership roles. His insights on delivering mission-critical operations to various departments are invaluable.

—David Powner, Former Lead IT Audit Reviewer at GAO

I highly recommend Richard's book for anyone leading change in a large organization. While the setting is mainly two large federal government organizations, Richard's insights and recommendations are as relevant in the private sector as in federal, state, and local governments. Richard has zeroed in on the key elements for success, and these recommendations aren't academic. They are based on his real-world leadership experiences, the lessons he's learned and applied, and the success he's achieved. This is a valuable roadmap for current and future leaders everywhere, especially in government, where building the public's trust is so critical. Kudos and thanks to Richard for his service and for adding such a valuable guide to our toolkit.

—Jim Cook, Former VP and Director for the Center for Enterprise Modernization, The MITRE Corporation

Having served federal and state government agencies for more than 30 years, I have learned the importance of agencies adopting practical, proven management practices to address their most pressing challenges. Richard's book describes a comprehensive approach for agencies to improve their performance. I'm particularly taken with his focus on the importance of agencies effectively managing their IT projects and programs through modern Agile-based methods. I recommend this book to anyone serving in a government agency or any contractor supporting an agency.

—Hamid Aougab, Scrum/Agile & Project Management Instructor and Consultant

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Table of Contents

Preface

I have seen numerous examples of poor government agency operational performance throughout my career. There have been mistakes in agency planning and budgeting, poor execution of large-scale programs, tepid responses to crises, and inefficiency in day-to-day operations. Yet, I have also seen and been part of some amazing successes that a government agency has delivered for its constituents, whether that be citizens or other organizations. The differences between how agencies performed were stark and enlightening. So, for some time now, I've wanted to write a book to address how government agencies, at the federal, state, and local levels, can use modern management practices and better leverage technology to drive significantly improved operational performance. In light of the continued loss of trust in government, it seemed more important than ever to get a blueprint for improving agency performance down on paper.

This book presents a framework for government agency performance improvement designed to change an inefficient culture and drive operational excellence. It outlines how government leaders can drive such change, and most importantly, it presents a proven approach for creating an environment that will affect positive change. This framework, a set of practical attributes and implementable best practices tailored for government, is unveiled throughout the book. There are examples in each chapter of agencies that implemented elements of this framework and the resulting impact on agencies' operational performance.

I gained a clear picture of what constitutes good operational performance through a career that has taken me into both the private and public sectors. Be-

fore working in government, I had the privilege of working for a very successful technology professional services firm and an early-stage software product company. After working as a government contractor for part of my early career, I was fortunate to work with some of the largest financial services firms on Wall Street and some of the largest telecommunications companies. I gained experience in how both small and large private-sector corporations operate. And I served under inspirational leaders and generally highly competent managers, gaining a clear perspective of how quality companies instill operational excellence.

I entered government and served eight years, first at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and then at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In my more than four years at the IRS (2004 to 2008), I led the successful turnaround of the multi-billion-dollar business systems modernization (BSM) program, became the IRS Chief Information Officer (CIO), and ultimately the Deputy Commissioner for Operations Support. In that role, I had responsibility for all support functions, including finance, IT, procurement, human relations, and administration.

In 2009, I reentered public service and served nearly four years as the CIO of the DHS. A year after joining DHS, I became the federal CIO council's Vice-Chair, supporting efforts to bring IT management best practices to all federal government agencies. And since my time in government, I have continued to work to improve government operations, most notably through my association with the American Council for Technology – Industry Advisory Council (ACT-IAC), a unique government and industry non-profit organization whose mission is to support improving government through the use of technology. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), congressional committees, industry, and media have recognized my work in driving positive change in government. And I have been fortunate enough to win numerous leadership awards recognizing my role as a change agent in government.

My direct experience is with large federal government agencies, yet I routinely interacted with peers at smaller federal government agencies and within state governments. Through those interactions, I have found that all government agencies have similar operational issues growing out of a lack of competition and numerous regulations and stakeholders. So, while using examples from large federal government agencies, this book can aid those in all levels of government and differing agency sizes.

Preface

In my time at IRS and then DHS, I served as a non-political appointee in the George W. Bush Administration and as a presidential appointee in the Obama Administration. Regarding government agency operations, I saw little difference in Republican and Democratic approaches to driving improved performance. Even in these most partisan of times, I found that when it comes to agency operations, it is possible for agency leaders to garner support from both sides of the aisle to drive positive change.

In writing this book, I endeavored to create a practical guide on transforming government agencies that can benefit all readers—whether you have made government service your life, study government as an academician or student, or are simply a concerned citizen. After establishing the need for improved government operations in Chapter 1, the book presents attributes and best practices for eight solution functions (Chapters 2 through 9). Each of these functions, when properly addressed, can individually and collectively significantly improve an agency's performance. For instance, Chapter 3 Good Governance – Key Ingredient in Good Decision-Making, examines governance issues in agencies and develops the arguments for, and describes the attributes of, a good governance model for an agency. The examples and arguments can help agency leaders justify implementing the necessary attributes and best practices to improve their agency's performance. Chapter 10 provides recommendations on how a government agency can develop a transformation plan to incrementally implement the attributes and best practices for each of these eight functions. The book also includes a Resource: Framework for Government Improvement—giving you a quick reference guide of the attributes and best-practice features for each of the eight functions, along with a sample agency transformation plan.

I have seen first-hand the amazing things government agencies can accomplish when they have experienced, capable leaders, adopt best practices tailored for government, and appropriately leverage technology to support improved operations. Under the right conditions, magic can and does happen. Change is hard, but through government leaders' and employees' efforts focused on implementing the right changes, agencies can significantly improve their operational performance. That is my passion and, at root, the reason I wrote this book.

Richard A. Spires
April 2023

Government Effectiveness

Even in the Face of Crisis, Not an Impossible Dream!

Introduction

2020 and 2021 will likely be two of the worst years in American history. Even with the best preparation, encountering a virus such as COVID-19 that is highly contagious and with high morbidity would cause massive disruption to our society. Yet when it became evident to all that this was going to be a real pandemic, we faltered at the federal government level as well as in many state and city governments. We struggled with rolling out testing and coordinating efforts to ensure ventilators and proper protective equipment were available for our front-line health workers and first responders. As the crises worsened, numerous states issued directives (or failed to) that under-minded public health experts' recommendations on topics such as mask-wearing and social distancing. The result was that life expectancy in the United States had its sharpest two-year decline in nearly a hundred years—from an average of almost seventy-nine years in 2019 to approximately seventy-six years in 2021.[1]

Interestingly, despite claims at the highest levels that the virus attack came as a surprise, government risk management models and disaster scenarios anticipated the likelihood of a pandemic with this level of transmissibility and lethalness. DHS, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services (HHS) and an element of the White House's National Security Council (NSC), had developed detailed plans to deal with a crisis just like this.[2]

Many pundits point to politics or even certain politicians. Yet, it goes deeper, to an inability for our government agencies, at various levels of government, to properly coordinate and operate with effectiveness and efficiency. The United States, the world's most prosperous and most powerful nation, looked incompetent early in the COVID crisis. And this was confirmed two years later, when in August of 2022, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), a sub-agency within HHS, called for an overhaul of the agency after an external review found it had failed to respond quickly and clearly to COVID. She faulted the agency for acting too much like an academic institution—one focused on producing "data for publication" instead of "data for action."[3]

Our government's early response to the COVID pandemic exemplifies a government operational failure. But COVID is just one of many examples. The crisis of lead poisoning in water in Flint, Michigan[4], the response to dramatic winter weather in Texas in February 2021[5], the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) weak oversight that contributed to the Boeing 737 Max accidents[6], and the SolarWinds cybersecurity attack that compromised numerous federal government agencies[7] are some of the performance examples that continue to plague government agencies.

These sustained failures have eroded overall trust in and respect for government agencies for the past few decades, and there is no reversal in sight. A Pew Research Center poll[8] shows that trust in the federal government has been shrinking, with seventy-five percent agreeing with that statement. Only two percent of Americans today say they can trust the federal government to do what is right "just about always," and only nineteen percent say "most of the time."[9] Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of respondents stated that low trust in government makes it harder to solve many of the country's problems.

Reflecting on my time at the IRS and DHS, I saw significant performance issues in federal government agencies. The performance issues were both in terms of effectiveness (the ability of an agency to provide a full suite of mission services) and efficiency (to provide such services timely and economically). Since I left the government, little has changed. Government agencies fail to leverage modern management and personnel practices at the federal, state, and even local levels. Further, agencies are leveraging a fraction of the technology

innovation that can drive effectiveness and efficiency. Irrespective of party affiliation, our political leaders pay too little attention to driving operational excellence in government. There is much lip service but not the level of thought and dedication required to address crucial performance issues.

Our democracy and way of life depend on well-functioning government agencies—yet both are under threat. Now, perhaps more than ever in our lifetimes, we need to aggressively address the performance challenges facing our government agencies. By boosting government agency performance, we not only improve service quality to our citizens but also begin rebuilding the lost trust in our public institutions.

Classification of the Problems

While government performance problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness look vastly different across agencies, it boils down to a combination of factors in four categories. These categories are:

- Leadership tenure, expertise, and experience
- Planning and resource alignment
- Program and operational management and oversight
- Resilience and security.

No single problem category is necessarily the culprit, but together they conspire to make government agencies operate inefficiently and, in some cases, ineffectively. These categories interact in complex and varying ways, which tends to obfuscate the underlying root causes of a government agency's ineffectiveness and inefficiency. That's why it is critically important to identify and address the root causes of these problems because addressing a single root cause can have manifold positive impacts across all four categories.

Problem Category 1: Leadership tenure, expertise, and experience

There are three separate, but related, aspects of leadership and management challenges that affect an agency's performance:

- tenure, the amount of time a leader is on the job
- expertise, the existence of relevant knowledge and competency about the function or mission for which that leader is responsible
- experience, a leader's involvement in relevant, similar situations.

These three are somewhat interdependent, but all three impact the ability of a leader to be effective.

One of the most striking differences between the private and government sectors is the differing levels of leadership tenure and continuity. In the private sector, there are generally accepted lengths of service for leaders. For example, at the CEO level, the current average length of service is 7.2 years.[10] Perhaps more importantly, in most well-run companies, those that rise to become the CEO of their companies have typically spent years in those companies, in many instances, in leadership roles running segments of the business. While there are times when a board of directors may bring in an outside leader because the company has become complacent and lost its edge, it is much more the case that directors choose from an executive already with the company. For good reasons, most companies value the continuity of grooming a successor and having confidence that the new company's new leader has the expertise and experience in understanding the business and the cultural fit to lead the organization. This concept works not only at the CEO level but cascades down the management ranks. That is why well-run companies spend time and effort on succession planning. It is not foolproof, but there is much to be said for the continuity of leadership.

In government agencies, we typically see the opposite dynamic regarding leadership continuity. Agencies differ significantly in how they fill leadership positions. And they also vary in the length of tenure individuals stay in their positions. At the federal government level, the vast majority of agencies have political appointees in leadership positions, and the tenure of such leaders typically lasts between twenty and thirty months.[11] Also, there are a significant number of political appointees in management leadership positions at many agencies. For instance, at DHS, where I served as one of the political appointees in the position of the DHS CIO, the agency has 286 political positions, most of which hold management positions in the agency.[12] By contrast, at the IRS, where I first served in government, there are only two political appointee positions, the Commissioner (who leads the agency) and the Chief Counsel.[13] Further, the Commissioner is nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term, which does not expire with a change in administration. The small number of appointees and the IRS Commissioner term are unusual compared to most agencies—it helps lessen the impact on the IRS of outside influences and politics.

Government Effectiveness – Even in the Face of Crisis,
Not an Impossible Dream!

From my experience, the number of political appointees and the subsequent average tenure of senior leaders profoundly impact a government agency's performance. One of the things that impressed me most about the IRS was its management capability and the importance agency leadership placed on the development of managers and executives. Like many large corporations, the IRS has multi-tiered development programs to identify and groom individuals to step into management positions. As individuals succeed at first-level manager positions, executive management selects them for additional development and rotational assignments. By the time an individual is ready to become a senior executive in the IRS, they have had multiple management and executive assignments in different parts of the organization. The individual has also been through various formal management development programs. Thanks in part to this system, I found the career executives that I worked with at the IRS, on balance, to be professionals in terms of their management competence and experience in the business functions they oversaw.

In comparison, at DHS, many of the senior executives I worked with were political appointees, and not surprisingly, it was a very different dynamic. Undoubtedly, these appointees were passionate about DHS's mission and felt they were doing the right things for the agency. And some of these political appointees had solid management backgrounds, and I enjoyed working with several of them. Yet it was astounding to see the difficulties some appointees had in the management positions in which they served. These appointees had hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of employees under their management, yet they provided little guidance and oversight. I observed that these management difficulties typically arose when an individual had strong policy credentials but little background in managing larger organizations.

Political appointees struggling in management roles would typically leave the agency after about two years. While the stated reason was always to move on to a better opportunity, I sensed that the job became overwhelming for them. With little to no formal training or experience leading large organizations, they could never find their footing. As such, they would have little to no positive impact on the organization they led.

To exacerbate the situation, once a political appointee left a management position, DHS would typically appoint a career executive in an "acting" position for an unspecified amount of time. Not being a political appointee, the "ac-

tor" would not have the confidence or trust of the agency's political leadership. Without such trust, the "actor" would find it difficult to drive change in the organization—they were relegated to ensuring that standard operational processes and reporting requirements continued. So, we had too many ineffective political appointees in crucial positions, who were then followed by unempowered career executives. DHS's perennial leadership challenges are on display yearly when the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey results are published. DHS consistently ranks near the bottom of the list of large agencies in the overall rankings.[14]

While my experience has been working at federal government agencies, there are similar leadership tenure issues at the state and local government levels. For instance, state governments, with elected governors, also have significant numbers of political appointees. As a specific example, many state CIOs are political appointees, and their average tenure is approximately two and one-half years.[15] Certainly, there are significant differences in agency structure, the number of political appointees versus career executive staff, and the average leadership tenure. Still, it is safe to state that the dynamic of having leaders without the requisite experience and expertise to fill crucial positions, combined with the short tenures of such leaders, is a significant issue in government at all levels.

Beyond the basics of being unable to provide good leadership and management oversight, leaders who lack experience managing large organizations also negatively impact an agency's ability to govern itself well, and in particular, to make good decisions. In a large, complex agency, having the proper delegations of authority and ensuring those with such authority have the correct information and solid analysis to support sound decision-making is critical to an agency's success.

Yet again, if a leader has no background in delegating effectively or empowering other leaders, or understanding how to evaluate leadership talent to know who to rely on, an agency can be rendered dysfunctional. We witnessed this at a massive scale with the U.S. federal government's response to the COVID pandemic. Sadly, U.S. federal government leadership marginalized so many capable, even world-class, public health experts and biomedical scientists' efforts. As evidenced by certain other nations' responses, including those of New Zealand, South Korea, and Germany,[16] the United States could have and should

have suffered much less illness and death and, somewhat ironically, less economic impact.

Problem Category 2: Planning and resource alignment

You can turn to almost any government agency's website and find a nice-looking, well-written strategic plan with a five-year vision, goal statements, and specific objectives provided for your review. Agency officials, up to and including the head of an agency, take the development of these strategic plans seriously and believe they serve their constituents well by providing this level of insight into their plans.

Yet, in many agencies, there is a chasm between the aspirations in their strategic plans versus the reality of what it will take to realize those plans' goals and objectives. Sometimes it is about money; there are certain situations in which an agency is so underfunded that it can barely handle its day-to-day operational responsibilities, let alone invest in improving itself. But the more likely case is that there are sufficient funds to make significant progress on executing a strategic plan. Still, for several reasons, those funds are not allocated properly, or the planning and management of the initiatives and related programs are lacking, resulting in sub-par performance and subsequent outcomes.

Interestingly, the politically appointed leaders described in the previous section—those with policy backgrounds—are typically well-suited to developing good strategic plans. They see the big picture, are passionate about how an agency can more effectively address mission imperatives, and have good insights into how politically they can help navigate an agency forward, whether in Congress, a state legislature, or a city council. But as described above, these same individuals then struggle with the organization and leadership aspects of driving the organization forward. However, the problem goes beyond just leadership, as almost any strategic plan calls for significant change in how an agency will operate over time. So many leaders, even seasoned leaders, significantly underestimate what that change entails and how difficult it can be to make such change.

Government agencies, at all levels of government, are usually large and complex organizations. In addition, they operate in an environment that presents constraints beyond what one typically finds in the private sector, for instance:

- Agencies are subject to significant regulation in terms of laws and other mandatory guidance to be followed

- Agencies are subject to considerable oversight by legislatures and independent inspectors general (IGs)
- Many agencies have protections they must adhere to regarding their employees and their treatment
- Almost all agencies have substantial investments in legacy IT environments that hamper their ability to be agile in developing and fielding new capabilities.

So, writing a strategic plan that lays out aspirational objectives to accomplish in a five-year timeframe is relatively easy. Yet, it is significantly more difficult for agencies to implement those changes, given the constraints they are subject to and the necessary skills and experience required to implement such changes.

Driving such change starts with good planning, and this is where agencies first stumble. For example, in the field I know best, IT, the modernization of systems, or even creating new systems, can be daunting when dealing with a complex, legacy IT systems environment. When I was at the IRS, we would joke that there was more complexity in interfacing the new system with all the legacy systems than in creating the new system functionality itself. That was an exaggeration, but not by much in some instances, when we measured the project expenditures on legacy system interfaces versus new functionality.

Another example of complexity is dealing with the impacts system and process changes have on the user community, which may be employees, but also can include outside constituents, including citizens. Rolling out any process change when dealing at scale (for example, thousands of users) requires management discipline to ensure the users understand:

1. Why the process is changing
2. The benefits to the users of the changes
3. Training on the details of the changes and what to do differently
4. Support for users that make mistakes or get confused
5. Very significant testing before rollout to ensure the changes are easily understood and users know what to do.

It is not surprising that many agencies struggle to adequately plan and budget for the level of change management required to successfully launch new capabilities.

Resource alignment, executed via the budget formulation process, is the logical progression from planning. Almost all agencies at all levels of gov-

ernment operate on an annual budget cycle. Certain agencies can implement changes in their processes and enhance their capabilities with only internal staff. Yet, the vast majority of agencies need outside procurements to support these initiatives, including purchasing specialized expertise along with other goods and services. Budget formulation and procurement become critical to advancing an agency and must be well synchronized with the overall planning process.

Many agencies struggle with another aspect of budget formulation as well. Agencies typically develop budgets by making incremental changes to the budget during the annual budget planning cycle rather than using the rigor of a zero-based budgeting model. The difference between the two is profound regarding the effectiveness of an agency's budget formulation process.

Zero-based budgeting means that every sub-agency and organization within an agency must justify every line of its budget. If an organization cannot justify a budget line item, it should be significantly reduced or even eliminated. Contrast that to incremental changes to a budget. Each sub-agency and organization assume it starts with its current budget and always asks for more to invest in new capabilities and staffing. Based on input from each sub-agency and organization, agency leadership then gives each organization guidance regarding what it can have in terms of budget, with each organization having to respond, either making cuts or funding some of their proposed projects.

Most agencies claim they use zero-based budgeting but, in reality, execute an incremental approach. Agencies do this for two reasons. First, there is genuine fear in an agency that a zero-based budget approach can affect employees and their jobs. Secondly, the planning process is weak in many agencies. In those cases, the incremental approach is much easier to manage. Agency leaders can submit budget requests on time and more easily defend them as working to make some advancements while preserving the agency's current operational capabilities. Such leaders avoid making difficult decisions regarding setting priorities and then supporting those priorities with the proposed reallocation of agency resources.

Problem Category 3: Program and operational management and oversight
When I was offered the DHS CIO position in 2009, DHS leadership told me the main reason they wanted me to join was to deal with the issues surrounding the

management of a number of the major DHS IT programs.

At that time, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Secure Border Initiative Network (SBInet) program[17] was of particular concern. SBInet was a program to install towers along sections of the U.S. southwest border with Mexico, and install several sensors on these towers, including visual and infrared cameras and motion detectors. The concept was to create a virtual fence along sections of our border, obviating the need for additional physical fencing. So, the program also developed a sophisticated network and set of applications to connect these towers virtually. The concept certainly had merit, but when I arrived and studied the program, it was clear the government and the prime contractor had made one of the classic mistakes in program management—they had over-promised what could be delivered and when.

CBP made these promises based on the assumption that every component of the system was "commercially available." However, they severely underestimated what it would take to field such a system, in a hostile desert environment, with significant complexities in interconnecting these towers. Some of the problems were physical, with the cameras unable to effectively withstand the weather elements. Some problems were software-related, as the program struggled to develop and deliver the applications software to provide the "situational awareness" required to meet the stated outcome objective of having a virtual fence capability.

After I started at DHS, one of the actions I took was to request a review of all major IT programs across the agency. At that time, there were ninety-two such programs (by major programs, we used the guidance provided by the OMB – which included programs "…requiring special management attention because of their importance to the mission or function to the government and with significant program or policy implications….").[18] Many of these programs had systems in production, and the program was still in existence to operate and upgrade the systems. But dozens of the programs were in the planning or development phase, expending in some cases tens of millions of dollars annually to build systems to support the homeland security mission.

The plan was to hold a two-hour review with the program manager and support team for each of the ninety-two programs. I worked with my team in the Office of the CIO to develop a presentation template to cover what would be considered standard items in a program review, including: program manage-

ment office (PMO) structure and staffing, defined proposed benefits of the program, baseline schedule and deliverables, performance against baseline, risks and mitigation strategies, and so on. We then worked to set up, over a six-month schedule, the meetings to hold all of these program reviews.

It was a fascinating set of reviews. First, it was a tremendous education for me regarding the scope of what DHS does and the initiatives for improvement across all sub-agencies of DHS mission elements. Second, it was an eye-opening experience to see the range of competence of the program teams.

Some programs were well-managed; in particular, I found the programs run by the U.S. Coast Guard to have the most mature processes and experienced and skilled program offices. However, across a wide range of programs across most of the agencies within DHS, it was disappointing to see the level of competence of most PMOs and the state of the program plans and regular reporting. Most programs had significant gaps in their PMO staffing, struggling to find individuals with even a fraction of the needed experience to fill particular positions. I was especially distressed to see the number of major programs in which the program managers were not ready to handle the programs' scope and complexity. These program managers were trying, but many could not effectively answer some basic questions about their program status and what they were doing to address current issues and risks.

It became clear that DHS lacked enforceable standards for how it staffed and managed its major IT programs. Furthermore, given the amount of program management talent currently available across DHS, it was attempting to handle more programs than it had talent to manage effectively. And this lack of talent was not just in development programs, as there were also significant talent gaps for programs that had fielded production systems and were in operations. One can argue that DHS is an outlier, given the agency was created in 2003 in the wake of the 9/11 disaster. There was tremendous pressure on DHS to deliver new capabilities, from better screening at airports, to improving our national cybersecurity protection capabilities, to enhancing the ability for immigrants to apply for status and benefits. Yet, we conducted these reviews in late 2009 and 2010, six years after DHS's formation.

Based on my experience working with other federal government agencies and some states, many of the issues I observed and addressed at IRS and DHS exist in other federal and state government agencies. While the federal gov-

ernment does significant training in project and program management, there is neither the pipeline of talent needed in government nor the career paths in which individuals can get the range of experiences required to prepare them to manage large programs effectively. As such, government agencies run more risks in program execution than they should, become overly reliant on contractors to attempt to fill voids, and continue to underperform.

Problem Category 4: Resilience and security

One can cite multiple examples regarding our government's issues in dealing with crises, a recent one being our collective response to the COVID pandemic. Other examples include our lack of a properly coordinated response to the forest fires that raged across the western states in the summer of 2019[19] and our response in Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria.[20] In the cyber world, the data breach at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)[21] and the insider breach perpetrated by Eric Snowden at the National Security Agency (NSA)[22] showed the vulnerabilities agencies have in protecting some of our most sensitive personal data. More recently, the ransomware attacks on local (county and city) governments show our collective lack of resilience when it comes to cybersecurity.[23]

Resilience is defined as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties,"[24] which rests on three capabilities.

- First, when an organization is in the midst of a crisis, its resilience depends on how it responds hour-to-hour during the crisis, involving the right people, making the right decisions, and managing effectively throughout the crisis.
- Second, an organization should have plans in place to improve its ability to respond effectively during a crisis. For instance, does an organization understand the various crisis scenarios it may encounter and have a playbook (an incident-response plan) that enables it to quickly identify who and what other organizations need to be involved and what actions to take? This planning is key to increasing the collective capacity for the organization to quickly respond to and then recover from a crisis.
- There is a third, implied ability to increase an organization's resilience. What if it's possible to mitigate the extent of the potential difficulty before it happens or eliminate the chance of the difficulty from occurring? That is the ultimate form of resilience. Indeed, when it comes to natural disasters, we,

as a society, cannot eliminate the difficulty. But we can mitigate difficulties—a simple example being the promulgation of enhanced building codes for earthquake-prone areas, which can significantly reduce difficulties associated with an earthquake. In terms of cybersecurity, it is impossible to eliminate completely vulnerabilities that can lead to security breaches. Still, with proper risk management and action, the chance of a major breach of an organization's most sensitive data can be driven to a very low probability, greatly lessening the chance of a significant "difficulty" to address.

Some government agencies do very well in aspects of resilience. For instance, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Coast Guard have well-defined processes and procedures to deal with many types of natural and human-made disasters. Based on decades of experience, these agencies have continued to refine these capabilities and their ability to respond. And this response includes a whole-of-government approach, reaching out to other federal government agencies, as well as state and local governments. When I was at DHS, I always admired how FEMA and the Coast Guard could mobilize so quickly and effectively when responding to a crisis. The dedication of the FEMA and Coast Guard employees was quite inspiring when a crisis arose.

Yet why do agencies, and sometimes our government, flounder in certain crises? Part of the problem, at an agency level, is that agency leadership did not understand its risks and plan accordingly. OPM's widely publicized data breach is one such example; the agency was utterly unprepared. OPM was responsible for storing more than twenty-one million personal records of individuals who had gone through the process to obtain a security clearance for access to sensitive and classified data.[25] Being one of those twenty-one million, I understand the sensitivity of that data; you are documenting very personal information about yourself, in particular, past actions that many of us would never want to be publicly exposed. Yet OPM did not take the protection of that data seriously. It was stunning that a number of the core systems that housed and used those personal records did not even have authorities to operate (ATOs), which are authorizations that these systems had minimal security controls in place to protect the data they hold and process.[26] Further, the OPM IG noted these shortcomings reports for years before the breach.[27]

While there are pockets of excellence, such as what FEMA does to mobilize in a crisis, there are many instances in which government agencies are simply ill-prepared to deal with a crisis. When I was at DHS, there was a failure to look at risk at a "whole-of-nation" or enterprise level. Even back in 2013, it was clear that we were woefully underfunding efforts to confront our cybersecurity risk as a nation. I know such analyses regarding our cybersecurity risk existed, but they were not appropriately used in the budget formulation process. It is an example, as described previously, of using incrementally-based budgeting rather than a zero-based budgeting approach. FEMA would argue strenuously it was underfunded to deal with physical disasters, and its case was sound. Yet, the threat and potential impact of cyberattacks were increasing exponentially, and our response as a nation was wholly inadequate to the threat. In DHS and across the whole government, we needed to use an enterprise risk management approach and be willing to allocate resources based on the current threat and potential impact environment. Too much of our planning is a generation out of date.

Furthermore, in today's environment, our response to a national crisis typically needs to be coordinated at the federal, state, and local levels, with support from the private sector and other non-government organizations. As we have experienced with the COVID pandemic response, we need a better-coordinated response capability across all these entities. FEMA has developed processes and practices to properly engage other organizations in response to physical disasters, although there are lessons to learn from its response in Puerto Rico during the 2017 hurricane season.[28] In different types of crises, we should learn from FEMA by developing response protocols that support our rapid and coordinated responses to other crises, most notably for pandemics and major cybersecurity events. Only then can we claim that we have "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties."

Profound Positive Change is Possible

Many people feel that government cannot do any better than what we see today. They say that the level of intransigence based on politics, the layering of laws and regulations, the upcoming retirement wave of government employees, and the seeming inability of government to attract bright, ambitious younger people conspire to make it virtually impossible to improve government effectiveness and efficiency.

Government Effectiveness – Even in the Face of Crisis, Not an Impossible Dream!

Yet many people do not appreciate what government has done and continues to do for us, and how much it can accomplish, even with its massive bureaucracy. For example, one of the more significant advancements delivered by the U.S. military that has benefited the world has been developing and fielding the global positioning system (GPS). Today, we take it for granted that we can know exactly where we are on our planet via our smartphone or a mapping device in our vehicle. But such capability is based on a foundation of several technologies. The atomic clock, accurate to 1 second in 100,000 years, is necessary to accurately determine position (this is another example of a government success, as the first atomic clock was developed at the U.S. National Bureau of Standards, now known as the National Institute of Standards and Technology, within the U.S. Department of Commerce).[29] The use of sophisticated satellites and advanced radio transmission modulation techniques also underpinned our military's research as it developed positioning systems.[30] And the GPS program continues to evolve today, with new satellites currently being planned for launch that will continue to enhance the system.

But GPS offers even more than position location. Those atomic clocks located on satellites form the basis for keeping time constant in our information and financial systems. GPS supports navigation for commercial and military ships and aircraft. But it also aids construction and optimizing farming, along with supporting the scientific study of earthquakes, volcanos, and the movement of tectonic plates. The GPS has helped generate nearly $1.4 trillion in economic benefits worldwide. And from 2007 to 2017, GPS, through routing software, has saved American consumers fifty-two billion gallons of gas.[31]

This transformational program evolved through multiple system deployments over more than sixty years, all funded by the U.S. military. There were times in the 1960s and 1970s when the program almost died. With persistence and sustained leadership, particularly from the U.S. Air Force, the program ultimately was successful, enabling the military, and then commercial entities, to develop low-cost receivers that could determine position with never-before-seen accuracy of a few meters.[32] With successive rounds of technological advances, receivers today can easily fit within a smartphone. But such capabilities, leveraging numerous technologies and the need for an extensive array of satellites, can only be carried out by a government agency that has sustained commitment, along with the competence in program management to deliver

and evolve such a complex system. I will return to key success factors for the program delivery of GPS in Chapter 7.

Another transformational government-sponsored initiative was the human genome project (HGP). This program has fundamentally changed the approach and capabilities of medical research. Officially launched on October 1, 1990, by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DoE), the HGP had the audacious goal of mapping the complete human genome within fifteen years.[33] Completed two years early, this program propelled the field of genetics and, in particular, techniques and technology for sequencing genes. The foundation of the HGP's work has enabled miraculous advancements. The HGP required thirteen years and more than $3 billion to sequence the human genome. By 2014, the company Illumina demonstrated the ability to sequence a genome for under $1,000; in 2020, that cost dropped to $600. Today, a human genome can be sequenced overnight.[34]

This sequencing capability has been instrumental to understanding the SARS-CoV-2 virus, providing the information required for the rapid development of the messenger RNA (mRNA)-based vaccines for COVID, including those offered by Moderna and Pfizer.[35] And importantly, this sequencing capability enables scientists to rapidly identify virus variants, aiding public health officials in developing appropriate pandemic response protocols. Additionally, the sequencing capabilities provide pharmaceutical companies with information as they assess the need to create booster vaccines for virus variants.

Initially, two principles underpinned the HGP. First, it welcomed collaborators from any nation (under the auspices of the International Human Genome Sequencing Consortium) to consider and apply diverse approaches. NIH leaders recognized the need for worldwide collaboration, given the scale of the program. Eventually, the U.S. government-funded approximately 200 laboratories to support various aspects of the program, and more than eighteen countries contributed to sequencing the human genome. The second principle was that the results and data from the HGP would be freely shared and publicly available within 24 hours of its assembly. This principle ensured that there would be no attempt to limit access to the data and results.[36]

Unlike the GPS program, in which the resulting capabilities are now well understood and mature, the HGP is a program that has spawned a whole new

set of specialties in genomics and medicine. These implications for medical treatments are now just beginning to be understood and harnessed. While not a promise, it is certainly possible that within a few decades, we will see the ability to detect and treat diseases well before they can harm and provide the capability to, if not eliminate pandemics, severely limit their impact.[37]

From a personal viewpoint, I have seen some amazing successes during my eight years of government service. In all cases, these successes were based on having competent leadership and management, with clear goals and sustained persistence, to drive significant positive outcomes for agency stakeholders and citizens. As an example, when I entered the IRS in 2004 to take over the leadership of BSM, the IRS flagship IT modernization program, the program was in trouble. And this was the third attempt at IT modernization at the IRS, with the first two having been spectacular failures. As evidence of this, GAO added the IRS to its high-risk list for its IT modernization efforts in 1995.[38] Agencies do not want to be on the GAO high-risk list given the publicity and scrutiny an agency receives for being on the list.

Through the efforts of many dedicated IRS employees on the front lines and in management, along with contractor support, we were able to turn the BSM program around. Perhaps even more importantly, we worked to institutionalize better planning and governance, and solidify program and operations management disciplines. This work served as a foundation for subsequent IRS leaders to further mature these processes. So in 2013, the IRS came off the GAO high-risk list for its IT modernization efforts.[39]

As further evidence of how the IRS had matured its ability to develop large-scale systems successfully, it had a significant role in the rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare) when that Act passed in 2010.[40] Unlike the botched rollout of the first version of healthcare.gov,[41] the subsequent rollout of ACA—with the IRS playing a pivotal role—was a success. To reach that positive conclusion, the IRS had to implement a significant set of new systems applications to handle the tax requirements of the new Act. The IRS implemented this program exceptionally well, delivering the program on time and on budget. (Elements of what was done in the IRS to support improving its modernization capabilities will be explored more in-depth in Chapters 3, 6, 7, and 8.)

The examples of the development and deployment of GPS, the human genome project, and improving IRS program-management capabilities are but a

few of the myriad examples in which government has shone. And even though it appears bleak right now, I am still so impressed by the dedication and capability of so many that serve our government at the federal, state, and local levels. There are immense talents and capabilities within agencies. Yet, too often, leaders don't recognize or utilize these capabilities. These leaders can't visualize the leverage and positive outcomes that can occur when an agency gains alignment of a team on an outcome and brings the right resources to bear. I have seen successes multiple times in my tenure in government and realize we need to make systemic changes in agencies that will make such successes more the norm

> **An DHS Vignette**
> While my review of the major DHS IT programs uncovered systemic weaknesses in the agency's capabilities, there are still significant DHS program successes. One program that impressed me was the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI).[42] The systems that support WHTI are part of a program that has been renamed Land Border Integration.[43] WHTI is the program that mandates what documents are required by those traveling to the United States from countries in the western hemisphere, including Mexico and Canada.[44] As part of the support for this program, the U.S. CBP, in collaboration with the State Department's Consular Affairs, developed and deployed, in a few short years, sophisticated systems capabilities at land-border crossings. These capabilities include automated license-plate-reader technology, along with radio frequency identification technology to confirm the citizenship and identity of travelers with WHTI-approved travel documents.[45] The information collected through these systems also supports DHS's enhanced intelligence capabilities. These systems have not only made our country safer, but have enabled CBP to increase substantially the flow of people through land-border crossings. Land Border Integration is a model of how a program should be structured and managed.

rather than the exception. I wrote this book to provide a framework and manual for how government leaders can do just that.

The Key – Improving Eight Functions of an Agency

Earlier in this chapter were described four problem categories in government that have led to such ineffectiveness and inefficiency in agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. These four problem categories are:
- Leadership tenure, expertise, and experience
- Planning and resource alignment
- Program and operational management and oversight
- Resilience and security.

Government Effectiveness – Even in the Face of Crisis, Not an Impossible Dream!

It's important to note that these are multi-faceted and interrelated problem categories. The complexity of addressing these problem categories is one of the reasons agencies struggle to drive significant improvement.

In attempting to address the problems, it is better to decompose each problem and align improvement actions organized so that an agency can effectively manage the improvements. For instance, it is not surprising that a key to progress across all these problem categories is ensuring agency employees have the proper training in the latest techniques and technologies applicable to their positions and gain experience through both on-the-job assignments and mentoring. As such, by aligning all actions that involve people and talent development, agencies can manage such improvements under the direction of their Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO). So, in investigating the best approach to addressing these four problem categories, eight solution functions have been defined, which, in combination, provide a framework for agency improvement. The table in figure 1.1 presents a mapping of

Solution Functions	Problem Categories			
	Leadership Tenure, Expertise, and Experience	Planning and Resource Alignment	Program and Operational Management and Oversight	Resilience and Security
People – The Solution Starts with the Employees	✓	✓	✓	✓
Good Governance – Key Ingredient in Good Decision-Making	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strategic Planning – Beyond a Vision and Goals		✓	✓	
Budget Formulation and Execution – Who Holds the Purse Strings?		✓	✓	✓
Procurement – Focus on Value		✓	✓	
Program Management – The Engine for Driving Change			✓	
Operations – Making it Better Every Day			✓	
Resilience and Security – Planning for the Bad Day that Will Come			✓	✓

Figure 1.1: Mapping of Solution Functions to Support Agency Problem Categories

the eight solution functions to the critical agency problem categories they address. As the table shows, the people and governance solutions functions help address all four stated agency problem categories. And due to the interdependence of programs and operations on so many agency functions, improving any solution function increases an agency's ability to effectively manage programs and operations.

A summary of each of the eight solution functions follows.

People – The Solution Starts with the Employees

People are the most important asset of any organization. Improving a government agency's effectiveness and efficiency starts with ensuring employees have the needed skills and experience for their position. Therefore, workforce planning is a crucial element of agency advancement, including understanding the requisite skills and abilities required in a position and providing developmental capabilities through training, mentoring, and on-the-job assignments for agency employees. This workforce development should occur at all levels of the agency, recognizing that the development of executive talent is a process that develops managers over a career, yet is of utmost importance to an agency. And this should apply to political positions as well, ensuring appointees have the appropriate expertise and experience to fill critical senior positions in an agency.

Good Governance – Key Ingredient in Good Decision-Making

Governance is how an organization functions, and in particular, the processes it uses to make its decisions. But good governance does more than just help with good decision-making; it helps drive alignment among key decision-makers in an organization. Good governance requires an approach that brings together the right stakeholders across an agency, including mission and business leadership, along with support functions, including, but not limited to, IT, procurement, finance, and human resources. Good governance requires proper delegation to a decision-making authority, which typically exists at the enterprise, portfolio, and program levels in agencies. Furthermore, good governance requires access to the correct information, at the right time, to support making the best possible decisions for an agency.

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Strategic Planning – Beyond a Vision and Goals

A good strategic plan lays out a well-thought-out vision for an agency, with realistic yet flexible goals, all supported by actionable, measurable annual objectives that can drive the realization of those goals over an agency's planning horizon. However, for that strategic plan to be a catalyst for change, the plan's objectives must be supported by planning at the portfolio and program levels. Planned outcomes and benefits of programs must align with and support those strategic objectives. In addition, an agency's enterprise architecture (EA), through the development of forward-looking business and technical architectures, needs to align with the agency's strategic objectives.

Budget Formulation and Execution – Who Holds the Purse Strings?

A good plan, including strategy and objectives that are correctly aligned, is brought to life through budget formulation and execution. Proper resource allocation is critical to achieving success, and it starts with the budget formulation process. An agency must develop realistic budgets at the program level to drive the needed outcomes and benefits that ultimately meet strategic objectives. Programs should have budget processes that allow them to use best-practice incremental delivery methods, particularly when delivering IT system solutions. In budget execution, proper transparency in reporting at all levels of an agency ensures adherence to budgets and supports necessary budget reprogramming activities.

Procurement – Focus on Value

In most government agencies, ensuring quality and timely purchases of products and contracted services is a critical success element for many programs. Furthermore, an agency's ability to effectively leverage its buying power, or even that of the government at large, for example, purchasing for all of a state government, can be instrumental to delivering its mission capabilities efficiently. It is also imperative that an agency has in place the procedures to support purchasing in a crisis, as part of its resilience capabilities.

Program Management – The Engine for Driving Change

Programs, or sub-attendant projects, are how any organization improves its offerings (for example, products or services) or internal processes. Change is often driven in an ad-hoc manner in many organizations, without much attention

to the program disciplines. For small organizations, such as start-up companies, this lack of discipline is acceptable when teams are very small, and agility and speed are at a premium. However, for government agencies, the disciplines brought by sound program management practices are essential, giving an agency a much greater probability of success by driving meaningful benefits for an agency and its constituents. The key to success is ensuring that disciplines support a program operating to deliver timely results. As such, disciplines should help streamline a program's ability to deliver outcomes, not hinder or slow the program's progress.

Operations – Making It Better Every Day
Whether for citizens, customers, or support for other government agencies, agency operational processes and supporting systems provide its products and services. Ensuring those processes and systems are effective and efficient should be an agency priority. Agencies should also work to ensure their critical systems' availability and resiliency. Agencies should use best-practice industry frameworks (for example, ITIL® for IT systems and services)[46] to help ensure they leverage the latest operational management techniques. Furthermore, agencies should continually improve their operations through analyses to identify areas that can drive greater effectiveness and efficiency. Such analyses should be a vital component of an agency's annual planning process.

Resilience and Security – Planning for the Bad Day that Will Come
An imperative for all government agencies is to anticipate and prepare for how an agency will respond to different crisis scenarios. Today, more than ever, this must take into account physical crises and those perpetrated in cyberspace. An agency's resilience, its ability to anticipate and react well in a crisis, should be a key component of its annual planning process. Furthermore, actions that can mitigate, or even possibly eliminate, risks to lower the probability and impact of a crisis should be part of an agency's strategic plan goals and objectives. Almost all government agencies' mission extends beyond normal day-to-day operations and should include an agency playing its role in a crisis.

Structure of this Book

This chapter introduced this book's contents, starting with an argument for why we need, as a society, to revisit how to lead and manage government agencies. Four significant problem categories that hinder agencies' ability to effectively and efficiently deliver their products and services were described. Eight solution functions were introduced and summarized to address these four problem categories. A mapping presented the linkage between a solution function and the underlying problem category it can help address.

The following eight chapters address each of the solution functions in turn. Each chapter includes real examples of challenges an agency faced, and how that agency implemented and tailored a particular solution to improve effectiveness or efficiency. Based on these examples and best-practice standards and processes from industry and government, best-practice attributes suited for government agencies are introduced and described for that solution function. Each chapter also includes a summary table listing the attributes and associated best-practice descriptions for a solution function. Also, a one-page "Key Takeaways" is included at the end of each chapter to serve as a reference guide for readers.

Chapter 10 is a capstone chapter for agency leaders. It focuses on practical approaches and advice for leveraging the eight solution functions and developing a transformation plan, showing how agencies can advance their mission operational performance. While every agency is unique and necessarily will have a transformation plan that needs tailoring to the agency, this chapter presents valuable lessons that agencies can use as they develop their transformation plans. In particular, agency leaders need to build credibility and buy-in for the change and work to institutionalize the change, so that even when agency leadership turns over, the agency has made sustainable progress.

To support an agency leadership's planning, a Resource: Framework for Government Improvement – Quick Reference Guide, is included after Chapter 10. This Resource provides the attributes and best-practice descriptions for all eight solution functions. It also includes a sample agency transformation plan.

Nomenclature

Across governments and government agencies, different terms are used to mean similar organizational structures or functions, sometimes within the same branch of government. For instance, in the U.S. federal government, I worked first for the IRS, a "Bureau" of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. I also worked for DHS. At DHS, we had "Components," which are sub-agencies, for example, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and CBP. So even in the federal government, there is no consistent naming convention for agencies.

To provide clarity, I use the term "agency" to refer to a government entity with operations responsibility, with a mission to provide some set of services or products to its constituents. With this convention, both the IRS and DHS are referred to as agencies. If a reporting relationship needs to be described, such as TSA being part of DHS, TSA is referred to as a sub-agency of the DHS agency.

Program and project management are two distinct disciplines. A program is defined as "a group of related projects managed in a coordinated manner to obtain benefits not available from managing them individually."[47] In contrast, a project is "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, and result."[48] Both are critical to agency success, but to simplify the terminology, the term "program management" is used to encompass all the disciplines required to successfully manage a program and its attendant projects. If it is necessary to distinguish between the two disciplines, it is done so explicitly.

Another ambiguous term used often in government is "acquisition." In some agencies, the term is used relatively narrowly and is essentially analogous to the term "procurement," referring to an agency's processes used to purchase goods and services. However, some agencies use "acquisition" in a broader sense that, for instance, includes the program or project management functions to "acquire" a new custom-built IT system. Sometimes you will hear someone ask if you mean "little a or big A" to distinguish whether the term "acquisition" is being used in the less or more expansive definition. In this book, I avoid using the term "acquisition" but instead use the terms "procurement" and "program management," since they are separate solution functions in this book. Together, the procurement and program management solution functions equate to acquisition when using the expansive "big A" definition.

Finally, there are many different titles for government executives with the same or similar scope of responsibilities. To be generic, I call the individual who is the ultimate leader of an agency the "head of the agency." It can be more confusing, however, for leaders in support functions. Some agencies have a Chief Operating Officer (COO), although the deputy head of the agency often has responsibilities akin to a COO in the private sector. Most government agencies today call the individual leading the IT function the CIO. This book uses that term. Similarly, in this book, the individual leading the finance function is the Chief Finance Officer (CFO), leading the procurement function is the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO), leading the human relations function is the CHCO, leading other administrative functions such as property and physical security is the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and the individual in charge of cybersecurity protection is the Chief Information Security Officer (CISO).

Conclusion

I leave you with two thoughts as you move into the heart of this book. **The first is that any lasting agency improvement made in any of the eight solution functions is good for an agency.** If you survey the eight solution functions, as shown in the Resource at the end of the book, an agency can address sixty-eight different attributes. From that perspective, it can appear daunting to digest and make progress. So, as you read the rest of this book, I urge you to look for examples that can work in your agency or the agency you support. Focus on potential areas where an agency can make significant progress quickly based on what is already proven and shown to work. Think about incremental improvements as the way forward.

The second thought is that even when an agency improves its performance, it is essential to consider how that improvement can be "institutionalized" within the agency. The litmus test is that once the current agency leadership leaves, will the improvement still remain? Or, as I have seen several times, is good practice washed away in the next set of leaders' desires to make their mark? Piloting improvements may be a place to start, but until they become part of how an agency does business, you cannot assume positive changes will survive leadership transitions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
from Chapter 1: Government Effectiveness

- Many government agencies fail to act effectively and efficiently, both in everyday operations and in crises. This dysfunction has led to a significant loss of trust in our government.

- Government inefficiency is rooted in issues in four main problem categories:
  1. Leadership tenure, expertise, and experience
  2. Planning and resource alignment
  3. Program and operational management and oversight
  4. Resilience and security.

- The leadership challenges that affect an agency's performance can be summed up in three separate, but related, aspects of leadership and management: tenure; the amount of time in the job; expertise, or the existence of relevant knowledge and competency about the function or mission that the leader is responsible for; and experience, or the existence of relevant experiences in different situations. These three are somewhat interdependent, but all three impact the ability of a leader to be effective.

- Change—even positive change—is never easy to implement. Almost any strategic plan calls for significant change in how an agency will operate over time. So many leaders, even seasoned leaders, significantly underestimate what that change entails and how difficult it can be to make such change.

- To effect positive change through zero-based budgeting, every sub-agency and organization of an agency should justify every line of its budget each year. The inference is that if a line item cannot be justified, it should be significantly reduced or even eliminated.

- Due to a lack of proper professional development in program management, there is neither the pipeline of talent needed in government, nor the career paths in which individuals can get the range of experiences required to prepare them to manage large programs effectively.

- Resilience is key to any agency's ability to manage through a crisis. It is defined as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties," which rests on three capabilities: mitigation of risks, proper pre-planning for crises, and good decision-making during a crisis.

- The best approach to improve issues in these four problem categories is to focus attention on eight solution functions that, in combination, can provide a framework for agency improvement:
  1. People – The Solution Starts with the Employees
  2. Good Governance – Key Ingredient in Good Decision-Making
  3. Strategic Planning – Beyond a Vision and Goals
  4. Budget Formulation and Execution – Who Holds the Purse Strings?
  5. Procurement – Focus on Value
  6. Program Management – The Engine for Driving Change
  7. Operations – Making it Better Every Day
  8. Resilience and Security – Planning for the Bad Day that Will Come.

By focusing on these eight solution functions to address the four problem categories, it is possible to effect positive and profound change!

About the Author

Richard A. Spires' background features leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. Besides serving as CIO at both the IRS and Department of Homeland Security, he served in several leadership roles in the private sector, including as President of Mantas, Inc., and CEO and a Director of Learning Tree, International. During his tenure at the IRS, he presided over the development of the Business Systems Modernization program, which has served as a blueprint for organizational transformation. A theme that has run through his career has been using advanced technologies and operational systems to transform the way organizations function.
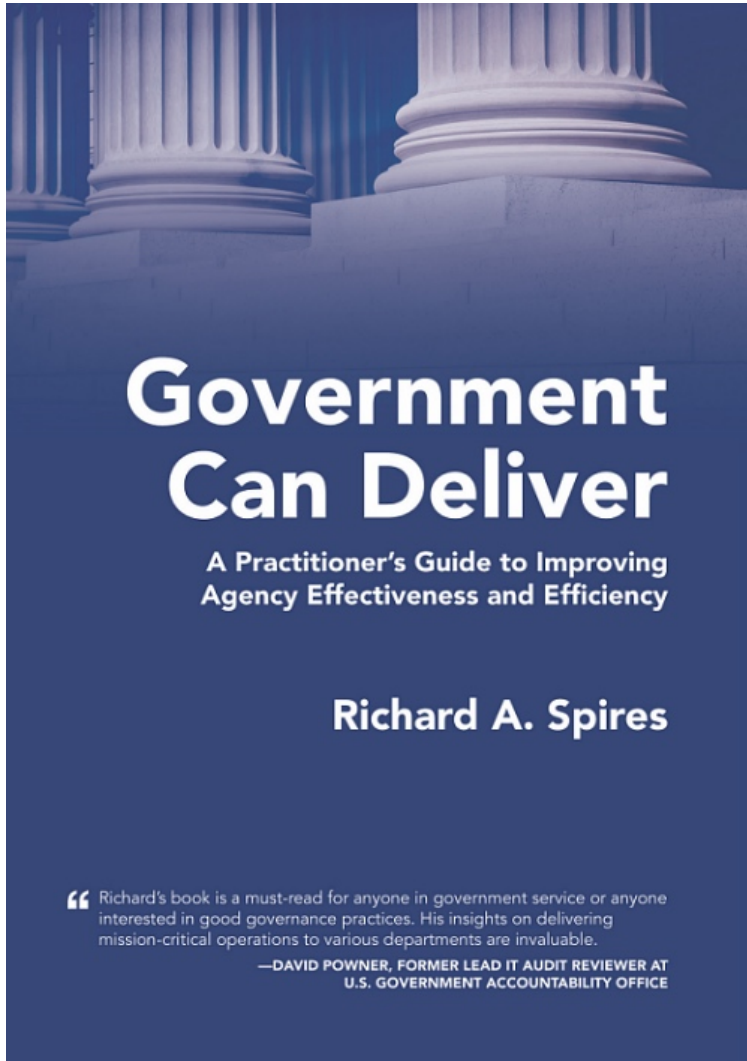
Richard has written numerous articles and columns on issues related to government performance and ways to improve, with particular emphasis on the use of information technology to support better government agency effectiveness. He has had the honor to testify before Congress more than a dozen times on government performance issues, including testimony on his views related to what went wrong with the launch of HealthCare.gov and the data breach of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Richard has won numerous awards for his leadership in IT, including the 2020 ACT-IAC Industry Executive Leadership Award, 2012 Fed 100 Government Executive Eagle Award, TechAmerica's 2012 Government Executive of the Year, and Government Computer News 2011 Civilian Government Executive of the Year. He was inducted into The George Washington University Engineering Hall of Fame in 2019 and named a Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Cincinnati's College of Engineering in 2006.

Richard received a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and a B.A. in Mathematical Sciences from the University of Cincinnati. He also holds an M.S. in Electrical Engineering from The George Washington University.

Richard lives in Colorado and Virginia with his wife, Jackie. They have three adult children.

Government Can Deliver addresses how government agencies, at the federal, state, and local levels, can use modern management practices and better leverage technology to drive significantly improved operational performance.

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