Your Guide to Productivity in Government

govloop

Contents

Executive Summary

Increasing citizen demands, paired with staff shortages and shrinking budgets, make it critical that government agencies become more efficient in the way they achieve their missions. But while the Government Accountability Office, the administration and other oversight authorities can issue directives for achieving that goal, it will ultimately be up to frontline public servants – the department leaders, program managers and analysts – to adopt and engrain strategies to increase productivity.

This guide examines the tools and strategies that public servants across all levels of government are adopting to increase productivity in their daily tasks. Rather than offering a single prescription for change, we explore various components of productivity and offer advice for how to select the right strategies for your agency. Those components include:

- Project management approaches to expedite product development
- Tools to organize mounting volumes of content, systems and data
- Strategies to fuel innovation in project execution
- Ways to enhance collaboration and information-sharing
- Potential applications of automation to improve accuracy and security

We include multiple examples and case studies to highlight how other state, local and federal agencies have adapted these practices to meet their personal productivity needs. We also include insights directly from government practitioners about how they've learned to improve performance and efficiency in their roles.

This guide is not a template for productivity. It is an exploration of the tools, tactics and strategies agencies can choose to meet their missions while still considering their individual needs, circumstances and resources.

Project Management Approaches to Know

The key to productivity is effective time and resource management. That's why it's critical for managers to strategically decide how those assets will be managed across the lifecycle of their project or program. There is a wide variety of tactics, processes and methodologies to explore. There are, however, four approaches that any government project manager must know, given their increased popularity and potential to dramatically improve productivity.

Waterfall

Waterfall, also known as "big bang" development, is the traditional project management approach, particularly in the public sector. In waterfall projects, requirements and timelines are established at the very beginning of a program and executed in a linear fashion. This approach ensures that agencies know exactly what they're investing in, how much it will cost and when it will be delivered from the onset of a project. It generates predictable outcomes and is therefore easiest to plan and execute.

Nevertheless, many agencies are beginning to turn away from waterfall as the de facto development approach. Waterfall is best suited for projects with clearly defined problems that require a single, static solution. For instance, defense agencies will likely continue using waterfall to manage artillery or heavy machinery production because they know exactly what they need to produce to meet mission goals.

But today, many agencies require more flexible, software-defined solutions that can adapt as user needs and the digital landscape change. Waterfall project management does not offer that flexibility without significant modification.

Agile

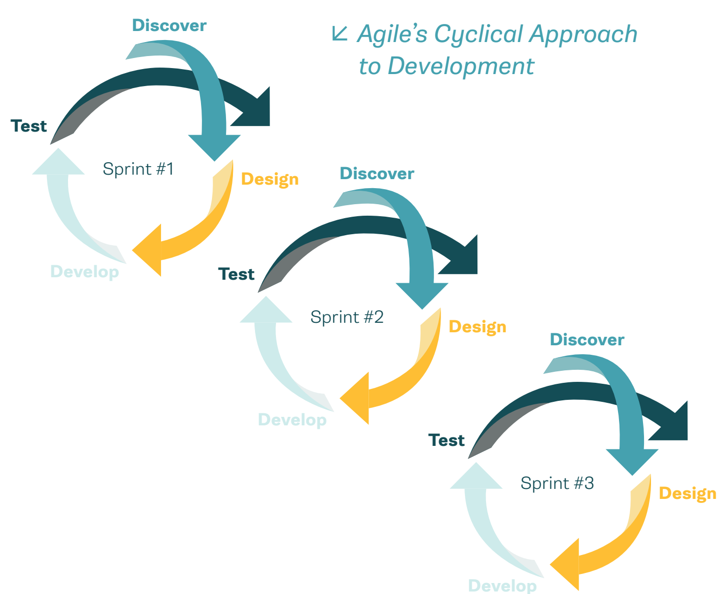
Agile is an incremental approach to product development where specific components or features are ideated, created, tested and improved over time. Agile allows for continuous improvement of minimally viable products (MVPs) so that organizations can quickly fine-tune or even completely change their products as they discover new needs or users.

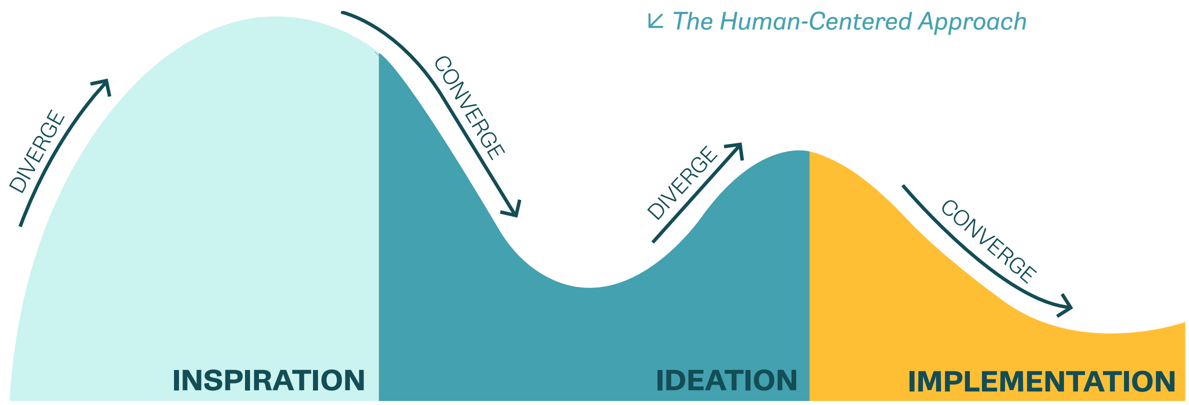
Agile is a blanket term. Different organizations have developed various approaches to implementing Agile, including most notably the Kanban and Scrum methodologies. But all Agile approaches maintain four common principles outlined in the original Agile Manifesto, which are:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working software over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan

The concept of Agile development is most often applied to software creation. Government organizations, however, are increasingly applying the iterative development approach to other facets, such as the request for proposal process and security authorization procedures.

↙ Agile's Cyclical Approach to Development





DevOps

DevOps is a niche approach to Agile that specifically targets the productivity of software developers and IT operations teams. In traditional development and even in some Agile projects, developers create custom products and then "toss them over the wall" to IT staff for ongoing operation and maintenance.

This hands-off approach is often problematic. Because developers don't have a clear view of how operations will use the service, the product they create often doesn't stand the test of real-world deployment. The new service can disrupt existing workflows, overload or damage current IT systems, compromise security or even fail regulatory requirements because developers didn't have enough information during development.

In some instances, operations teams create workarounds to use the service. More often, they have to toss it back over the wall so that developers can fix bugs, increase security or alter other features.

DevOps solves the problematic product handoff between developers and operations staff. Instead of operating in silos, both teams collaborate on a project from start to finish. They're using the same platforms, speaking the same language and sharing everything they do on a project in real time.

DevOps is steadily gaining ground in government, with training events like the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's DevOps Days becoming more common. More recently, agencies are considering adding other components and teams to the DevOps collaborative workflow. For instance, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is pursuing DevSecOps, where security teams are involved from the first stages of application development.

Human-Centered Design

Human-centered design (HCD), occasionally called design thinking, is a discipline in which the needs, behaviors and experiences of an agency's constituents or internal users drive the design of a solution to a particular problem.

HCD is an iterative project management style and, like Agile, comes in many formats designed by various organizations. But all HCD approaches follow a cycle that begins and ends with the user. The HCD process follows three broad steps: investigating the end user of a product to identify a problem to be solved, developing a prototype of a potential solution and then testing that solution with the end user to see if it solves the problem.

A major benefit of HCD is its application to non-software projects. For instance, the State Department's Collaboratory applied HCD principles to its education diplomacy programs' structure and design and the Intelligence Community has used the approach to better train its analysts. HCD, however, can be just as effective in creating digital services, as the Small Business Administration found when it redesigned its website. In reality, HCD can be applied to any project in which it's appropriate for the end user to define the project's outcomes.

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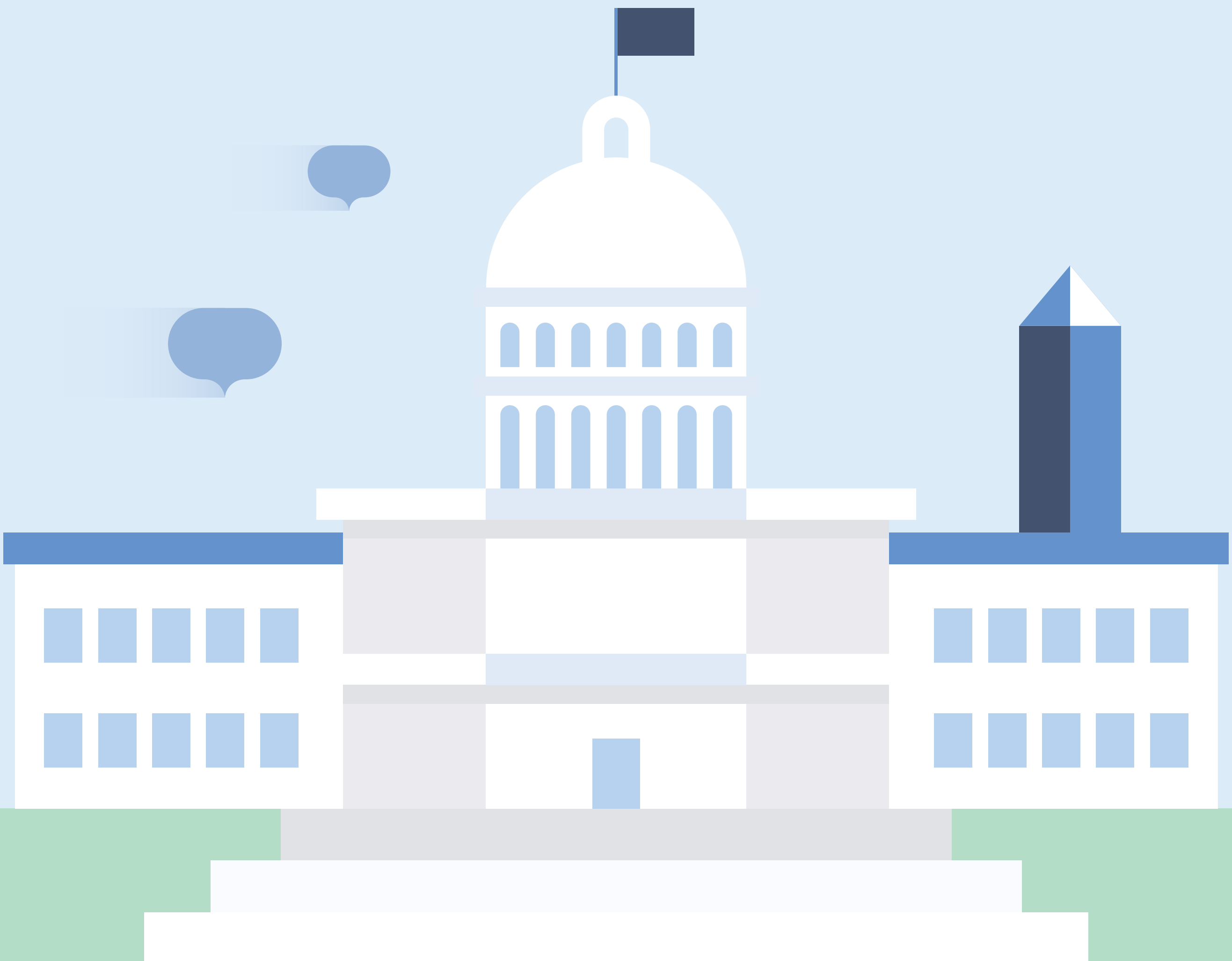

RightStar

carahsoft

Industry Spotlight

How Agencies Can Adopt Agile Practices

An interview with Dick Stark, President and CEO of RightStar Systems

Government organizations at all levels are increasingly adopting agile development approaches like DevOps. Not only do these iterative, collaborative processes speed up delivery times for critical digital services and applications, they also meet unique public sector needs.

To learn why agencies are adopting agile approaches, as well as what they need to succeed, we interviewed Dick Stark, President and CEO of RightStar Systems. RightStar is an ITSM/DevOps consultancy and Atlassian solution provider.

Stark said his consultancy often gets pulled into government projects where entire legacy systems, with extensive customizations in place, need to be replaced in a limited timeframe. In many cases, those agency projects begin with a waterfall approach only to determine that the process won't fit the large and complex scale of the task.

"That approach can't succeed," Stark explained. "We have to take it one piece at a time, go live, and then take another piece and go live again. People's budgets and circumstances are going to change, but we can still manage a big win if we take it one small win at a time."

Another scenario in which Stark sees agile playing a key role is cloud migrations. "If you were to ask anyone what their most urgent need is today, they would probably say to move everything to the cloud. That's a big project. It's not just a lift and shift; it takes a lot of work and ongoing project management," Stark said.

In cloud migrations, legacy system updates and other complex IT projects, agile workflows can dramatically increase time to service delivery while also ensuring that each incremental change doesn't disrupt the larger ecosystem of services and technologies.

But while agile can be a gamechanger for government, Stark advised against simply changing agency development schedules and assuming they will reap the benefits of iterative design. Instead, he explained that agencies must take the time to carefully assess their current people, processes and tools before adjusting to new methodologies.

For any new approach to succeed, Stark emphasized that the practitioners – whether they are developers or program managers – must be trained in the strategies, rationales and techniques associated with it. "Some agile practices can be gained through experience," Stark said. "But some parts can really only be taught in a classroom."

This training not only educates, but it also helps safeguard against early failures in agile adoption by equipping personnel with the skills and tactics they need to be successful.

Additionally, Stark explained that these practitioners must be equipped with necessary technologies, like Atlassian's Jira, Confluence, Bitbucket, and Bamboo, to fuel iterative development. Collaboration tools are required to keep developers, operations teams and other personnel in constant communication, while agile project management tools like Atlassian's Jira Portfolio ensure everyone is up-to-date on current progress. Moreover, automation plays a critical role in enabling agile sprints and processes to move quickly without sacrificing quality.

All of these technologies must be thoughtfully deployed to integrate with current IT systems. Additionally, they must be adopted in a way that doesn't disrupt current processes – even as they fuel new agile workflows.

Deploying the right Atlassian training, tools and processes to fuel agile adoption is a complex undertaking for most government agencies. To gain a better understanding of their agile or DevOps readiness, agencies turn to consultancies like RightStar for the best Atlassian solutions in conjunction with Carahsoft Technology Corp., Atlassian's exclusive public sector aggregator.

As an Atlassian solutions provider, RightStar conducts in-depth analyses of agencies' current processes and tools, assessing the effectiveness of capabilities like configuration management, system testing, application deployment and performance monitoring. For each stage of the development lifecycle, Atlassian partners consider the culture, organization, processes and tools that are currently in place – and how each is or is not facilitating agile tactics.

"Based on our findings, we provide agencies with practical and actionable steps that can dramatically improve application development and IT operations systems. We'll lay out what tasks you should tackle first and which can be addressed at a later time. You'll be prepared to decide on which initiatives to move forward with and which are not worth the investment of your time and resources," Stark said.

Agile and DevOps processes are a must for agencies seeking to deliver better services quicker and tackle large-scale IT projects without sacrificing performance or security. But to reap those benefits, agencies must take a thoughtful and guided approach to how they adapt the skills, processes and tools that enable their strategies.

How to Increase Engagement in Projects

By Catherine Andrews, Senior Director of Editorial and Production at GovLoop

How do you effectively manage a project or team when everyone is equal?

Being an influencer and gaining engagement for a project is often one of the most difficult jobs when you want to lead, but technically don't have the authority. So what can you do?

In a session at the Next Generation of Government Training Summit, Michelle Rosa, a cybersecurity risk analyst in the U.S. Navy, shared the best ways to motivate and inspire your peers in an effective and efficient way.

"Though I've moved up quickly in my career, I've never actually held a position of authority," Rosa explained. "So, this topic is very important and dear to my heart – and important to many others in government."

Rosa started off the session by asking the audience to really think about why they want to influence other people. If you don't really know your "why," it's hard to take action to actually influence others without a true mission.

Beyond the why, there are several concrete and tactical ways to improve leading through influence and your own authority.

#1: Listen

The number one skill, Rosa said? Listening skills – a skill that many people, frankly, need to work on, and don't often associate with leadership.

"Are you planning what you're going to say next? Finishing somebody's sentence? Interrupting? If you're doing that, you're never going to lead by influence," Rosa said. "The reality is most of the time we don't listen to understand. We listen to respond. We need to change that. There is a huge difference between listening and waiting for your chance to respond."

Rosa listed five things we can do to improve our listening skills: observe body language; focus on the person in front of you; acknowledge the message, which can be as simple as saying, "I hear you,"; give respect and space for the other person to finish; and the last thing is ask questions – nothing says, "I'm listening," more than asking simple questions.

#2: Establish Credibility

Showing integrity, showing competence, and being a good speaker, are all key to establishing true credibility as a leader, Rosa said. "You need to be the first one to show up on time, the first one to own up to your mistakes, you need to start thinking more about your team than yourself. You need to be accountable and show that you care."

Self-awareness is key to credibility as well. Do you know your weaknesses or blind spots? DISC, StrengthsFinders, and Meyers Briggs are all great personality tests to understand your weaknesses, so then you can acknowledge those and delegate them down when necessary.

Finally, being a good speaker helps establish credibility because it projects authority and confidence. Joining Toastmasters is one easy way to improve your speaking skills – not necessarily in order to be a good public speaker, but just for mere leadership presence and interactions.

#3: Add Value

Are you a chair-warmer at work, meaning you just show up and count down the hours at work? Or are you truly doing something every day to bring value to your mission? Three things can improve your value: knowing your organization and its mission inside and out; identifying your goals and projects that support your mission; and empowering your team members to tackle those tasks and goals that will bring you all closer to achieving your mission.

But how do you do that?

Rosa said the way forward is to bridge an individual's tasks to the mission. "As a leader, you need to bridge the gap between what motivates and excites people and what the agency mission requires," she said. What propels them? What motivates them? What helps them see the vision of the mission more clearly? Working to really understand your colleagues and what drives them is key to influencing people – because they then feel seen and supported by you.

#4: Develop Relationships

There's no getting around it – you need to improve your people skills in order to influence others and lead authentically. This is as simple as getting to know somebody by asking them for a walk or inviting them for a coffee. Find out about their hobbies or family. These things are genuinely important and help to create stronger relationships.

"You can't judge without knowing," Rosa said.

The other thing that helps develop relationships is truly and genuinely sharing credit. You need to start looking for ways to help others advance and shine the spotlight on them. "Call out specific other people who are key to the success of your projects," Rosa advised. And do it to leadership when possible.

So in terms of leadership - whether you have 'authority' or not - this acronym can help remember the value you can bring as an influencer:

L **Listen**

E **Establish credibility**

A **Add value**

D **Develop relationships**

"Leadership means it's not just about you anymore," Rosa said. "Raise others up."

Tools to Get Organized

While headlines often focus on declining budgets and shrinking workforces, there are parts of government that are growing at astronomic rates. Most notably, the amount of data produced, collected and stored by the public sector is constantly increasing. With that influx comes a number of demands, like creating and organizing information repositories.

Add to that, agencies are creating new web portals, sites and services to support new initiatives and reach new audiences. And those services have to be available across a wide variety of media – including mobile, text, phone and more. All this combines to mean that while the workforce isn't growing, the amount of content and services it has to manage is.

That creates a major roadblock for employee productivity. How do public servants continue to generate content, provide services or do anything else if they can't navigate the ever-growing trove of digital applications that are supposed to help them do that? The key is to organize those applications in a central platform.

These tools not only consolidate information, they also make it more accessible and user-friendly. That ultimately enables government workers to focus on their job, rather than sifting through information and technologies for resources. Three of the most common organization-minded platforms to consider are:

Learning Management System (LMS)

LMSs are software applications or platforms that administer, document, track and report on training. Most often, they are used to manage eLearning programs, where coursework is delivered by video and other on-demand, virtual formats.

LMSs provide a wide variety of functionalities. For most agencies, the biggest benefit of LMSs is the ability to automate enrollment and track the progress of training participants. That helps learning managers, compliance officers and human resource personnel ensure that employees are receiving the training they need, without having to cull through manual progress reports. More robust LMSs can also increase frontline employee productivity by allowing them to easily navigate training curriculum in an on-demand setting

Enterprise Content Management (ECM)

ECM is a broad category of platforms that capture, manage, store, preserve and deliver content and documents. Especially in government, that content can vary significantly – from internal records or processes, to website content and public press releases, to information about interactions between constituents and public servants.

It's the wide variety of communication tactics, mediums and purposes that makes ECM so important to government. With ECM systems, agencies can manage both internal and external content in a central platform. They can also use ECM systems to craft that information, ensuring consistent yet tailored messaging is delivered across a variety of media and platforms.

Finally, ECM systems often provide functionality to allow non-web developers, like press or communications officers, to modify web content quickly and easily. That increases frontline productivity, giving personnel the ability to manage and alter agency content without having to call in IT or web masters.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems

ERP systems help consolidate, streamline and monitor the work of the entire agency – including human resources, procurement, finance and other departments. They do so by creating common data standards and definitions and then applying those standards to all data that's ingested in a single software platform.

By creating a centralized, holistic view of all processes, agency administrators can form a more accurate picture of where redundancies, inefficiencies or other avoidable costs exist. They can also use an ERP system to make better decisions about future operations. ERP does not have to be executed in a software application, but ERP systems or platforms can improve the transparency, efficiency and accuracy of business planning processes. This is especially true when ERP systems leverage automated data ingestion, standardization and processing.

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5 Steps to Improve Service Delivery

An interview with Christian Malone, Advisory Solution Architect at ServiceNow

We know that government has important objectives to meet, like protecting the nation's critical infrastructure, delivering citizen services and regulating institutions. All of these mission-critical functions are enabled by constant, reliable IT service delivery. Unfortunately, many agencies find it challenging to deliver 24/7 service which hinders the accomplishment of these critical goals, while also hurting government's reputation with citizens.

In an interview with Christian Malone, Advisory Solution Architect at ServiceNow, he identified three primary reasons that service outages occur.

First, there is a lack of service visibility. "If your IT staff can't see all parts of their service environment and how they're connected, they can't deliver high-quality business services," he explained.

That leads to a second barrier: unreliable service availability. If a component, like a server, goes down, IT teams won't be able to address the issue until after it's already happened. That results in reactively tackling the problem which leads to the third challenge of slow response and resolution.

Most of the time, IT staff have to manually correlate data to discover the cause of service outages. That requires spending extra time and labor on tedious tasks like sorting through naming conventions or looking up terms in support books.

But while these three challenges can often lead to poor service delivery, Malone emphasized that there is a way forward. To prevent service outages, agencies must harness three capabilities: proactively identifying service issues, pinpointing disruptions and automating remediation. ServiceNow recommends a five-step approach to ensure service delivery is maintained and outages avoided.

The first step is to discover and map relationships between business services and the IT components dependent on them.

Consider the example of a service presenting a citizen-facing website. You might have configuration information for your web, application and database servers but do you know on which this service is dependent to operate? Mapping the relationships between these dependent configuration items is critical to understanding what happens to the usability of the website if one component is affected.

It can be useful at this stage to leverage a central platform, like that provided by ServiceNow, to assist in mapping and correlating services. "We offer the ability to automate creation of and then visualize both your services and all of the dependent configurations of devices – how they affect each other and how they affect the service," Malone said.

The next step is to make sure you keep service maps current. Continuously monitor the IT infrastructure for changes and have the service maps update in near-real time. "Technologies are constantly evolving and agencies are adopting them into their environments. You'll need a method to identify these environment changes and how they might impact service dependencies," Malone said.

Once your service maps are up-to-date, your third step is to ingest events from across the IT landscape. If you ensure all infrastructure events are collected in a single dashboard, you can gain a consolidated view of service-impacting events for a rapid and effective response. When IT can view all events in one place, they can make better decisions.

That leads to step four of prioritizing issues and automating fixes. Using technologies like machine learning, your IT staff can correlate alerts for improved organization and reduce multiple alerts to a single phenomenon. Automation also plays a critical role here, because it allows teams to tackle problems more quickly, reduce manual tasks and improve productivity.

"Correlating against ITSM functions is critical, if there's an issue and it's in a change window, we can suppress those alerts to help IT work the more important ones first," Malone said. "ServiceNow provides a health service dashboard and service map that allows us to discover which issues are mission critical and address them appropriately."

Using a single dashboard, IT can prioritize the issues that will affect the most mission-critical services and address the less important issues later.

That enables the final step which is to gain visibility into business services health. "This is where your organization can transform from an IT-focused agency to a service – and user – focused agency," Malone explained.

Rather than focusing on what IT components were affected by outages or disruptions, your agency can focus on how services were affected. You can also prioritize the resolution of issues that will most significantly impact user services and experience.

While service outages may seem inevitable, they can be prevented. By leveraging a single platform to map, understand and remediate service issues, agencies can continue to deliver mission-critical priorities, saving time, resources and ensuring utmost trust from the public that government serves.

How to Get More From Your Projects

These insights were originally shared on GovLoop.com as part of our Featured Contributors program.

Building Innovation Into Project Management

By Dr. Tyrone Grandison, Chief Information Officer at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation for the state of Washington

Let's start with the fundamentals. Innovation refers to the successful conversion of concepts and knowledge into new products, services or processes that deliver new value to society or the marketplace.

Innovation may arise when a project manager is creatively guiding the team through the solution process or when they are mitigating risks or removing constraints.

To get to an innovative solution, a project manager must embed creativity as a natural part of user and team interaction and/or find creative pathways around obstacles and roadblocks.

When faced with a risk that must be avoided or mitigated, a project manager should facilitate the generation of ideas that add value – in order to determine the appropriate risk response strategy and its associated contingency plan.

Though some project managers instinctively understand and incorporate innovation thinking into their execution, others need a framework to help maximize the likelihood of delivering an innovative solution.

The common thread that runs through all the innovative initiatives, which I have been a part of, are the following four pillars:

1. **Purpose** – The problem that you are solving and insight into whom you are solving this problem for
2. **Expertise** – The knowledge of the domain and the skills needed to successfully execute
3. **Environment** – The present workflow and future ecosystem conditions that need to be in place
4. **Process** – The implementation steps needed for long-term adoption

Purpose

In this stage, your only concern is working with your users to get a very clear picture of the problem and its root cause. You are also documenting a profile of the intended users, which includes their current way of doing things and your theory of change. Your goal is to know the dimensions of the problem space so well that you live and breathe the issue.

Expertise

Once you have a firm grasp of the problem, determine the skills that are needed to create a solution. Be sure to include team members who are new to the domain and will need to learn the space and thus will not be shackled by established and long-held assumptions and norms in the space.

When you are co-creating possible solutions with your users, encourage everyone to take the time and space to share creative possibilities. The final step in this phase is to have your team, which includes your users, prioritize possible solutions for implementation.

Environment

With your prioritized solution pathways, perform a sanity check to ensure that each of them matches the workflow of your users and that there is a natural insertion point. You should also examine the business, legal and societal ecosystem in which the solution will exist. This helps you to determine if there is policy work to be done, if there are business model or legal constraints to be factored in, and if there are any obvious unintended consequences to which you should be sensitive.

Process

It is implementation time. Develop features in short time periods. Present "the thing" to your users regularly, learn from their feedback and incorporate their input to improve the solution.

Conclusion

As a project manager, you have to actively solicit ideas that add value throughout the project lifecycle in order to ensure that the desired innovative result is achieved. Wherever possible, you should use tools that encourage your team to be creative and view all aspects of the solution space from multiple perspectives.

Not every project will be innovative. If you follow this advice, however, then your chances of delivering an innovative project will increase.

Writing Impact Statements That Make an Impact

By Hope Marshall, Training Specialist at the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Whether soliciting resources to address a challenge or reporting on successful milestones, impact statements matter.

Impact statements provide a quick summary of the challenge addressed, measures put in place to address it and what happened as a result. In other words, people want a detailed explanation of your efforts, without all the extra detail. Here, we share three tips on moving past statements that merely document outputs, to ones that show quantifiable results.

What issue was addressed and why?

Give a brief summary of the problem addressed, and the measures taken to identify the issue. Be mindful, however, not to get too caught up in method and theory. Identify your audience, so that you are using language (i.e., buzzwords) familiar to them. Mention any established partnerships, and give credit to those involved in the process. This can include community-based organizations or educational institutions. Other important information to include would be the amount of funding or other resources given to help address the issue.

What kind of impact was made?

An impact is a change in the level of knowledge, condition and/or behavior. For instance, your agency was awarded grant funding for the development of a community-based training program that will ultimately lead to increased employment opportunity for its participants. This is an increase in knowledge (job preparation) and condition (economic).

- Change in condition: social, economic, consumer impact
- Change in behavior: increased exercise, change in eating habits
- Change in knowledge: job preparation, skills development

What was produced as a result?

Share the major findings of the project. Using the aforementioned training program as an example, include the number of participants who enrolled in the program, as well as those who completed the training. One might also include how many participants attained employment as a result and in what industry, as well as starting salary information. In addition, share any anecdotal information, including statements from those who have benefited from your project (newly hired participants, employers and community partners). Lastly, share potential future impacts. Is there an expectation of increased employment? The creation of new industries? What might happen later should there be continued funding? Be sure to include visuals to further get the message across.

3 Ways to Enhance Collaboration

Given the increase in teleworking, the growth in digital communication channels and ever-mounting resources constraints, it's no secret that collaboration is required to maintain productivity in the public sector. According to a 2018 study, 47 percent of government workers say they need to collaborate daily with colleagues who are stationed in other locations, and 52 percent acknowledged needing an online connection to do work beyond their regular office space at least once a week.

Therefore, it's not surprising that agencies are seeking ways to foster multi-disciplinary and cross-departmental collaboration. Collaboration not only meets the needs of a resource-constrained and diasporic workforce, it can also improve productivity and outcomes. But how do agencies enhance collaboration? Like any change, there are three areas to address to enhance collaboration: people, processes and technologies.

1. People

The first and most critical barrier to overcome when pursuing collaboration is cultural aversion. Information-sharing is a core tenet of collaboration. Natural concerns over privacy and regulatory compliance, however, can make some government employees reticent to engage in cross-departmental sharing. So, how do you get people to collaborate?

Start by highlighting examples of how collaboration has improved government operations in other settings. When it comes to changing culture, communication is key. Offering examples that reinforce the value of collaboration gets your message front and center while also offering a proof of concept.

To encourage further buy-in, consider starting with small, low-risk projects that work with publicly available data and resources. These exercises can familiarize employees with the benefits of collaboration without the worry of inappropriately sharing information.

As you advance in your efforts, consider partnering with the Interagency Open Government Community of Practice or similar organizations at the state and local levels that can help identify and overcome regulatory barriers to intergovernmental collaboration and information-sharing.

2. Processes

One-off pilots for information-sharing or interdepartmental work are a great way to get agency employees into the habit of collaboration. But to truly engrain collaboration into the culture of your organization, you'll need more consistent and permanent processes that facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-departmental coordination.

Formal disciplines, like Scrum or DevOps mentioned earlier, are great ways to reimagine core processes in a way that operationalizes collaboration. But you don't have to follow rigid guidelines to create a culture of sharing. Instead, seek opportunities to alter processes that enhance collaboration without deterring from your department's natural productivity.

A thoughtful way to do this is to follow the human-centered design approach to journey maps. A collaboration-focused take on this exercise asks you to map routine processes, highlighting areas of exceptional productivity as well as areas where sharing and collaboration are especially weak. Target those latter areas or pain points as opportunities to focus on building more cooperation.

3. Technology

Finally, consider supporting your collaborative culture and processes with technology. There is a wide range of solutions available to create common virtual environments, facilitate information-sharing and even automate collaboration.

Some agencies have created their own collaboration tools and portals, like the Federal Acquisition Service's integrated collaboration environment, Interact. More often, agencies are seeking collaboration tools from external vendors. These solutions range from one-off portals like the communications platform Slack or the project management website Trello, to more advanced and holistic solutions. For instance, Wyoming transitioned its entire enterprise to Google Apps to increase transparency and collaboration in state government, while also cutting email and storage costs by nearly $2 million.

To facilitate collaboration with technology, make sure to choose tools that support, rather than direct, your collaboration objectives and processes. Additionally, consider each solution's ability to securely integrate with your agency's other systems and solutions.

Collaborate Outside the Shadows

The technology examples highlight how collaboration tools can be successfully and quickly deployed to enhance productivity. But not every collaboration tool creates the same results. Infamously, GSA's 18F was a forerunner in using the collaboration platform Slack only to have it shut down after a potential breach allowed unauthorized access to multiple of the agency's Google Drive repositories.

To ensure your department receives a return on investment from its collaboration technology or platform, make sure to consider:

Security Measures

Like any technology deployment, it's critical to consider the safeguards and security tactics that come with your collaboration tool. This is especially important when your tool is used to share information, as any breach might expose sensitive data. Make sure your tool is approved for use in government. For instance, a federal communications tool should be auditable and searchable, allowing for FOIA compliance. A cloud-based solution should also be FedRAMP-approved. Any social platform should be consistent with U.S. Digital Registry guidelines. Additionally, check that the tool meets the particular compliance standards of your agency.

Contracting

Not only should you thoroughly vet a technology for security, you should also scrutinize contracting language related to the full lifecycle of the tool. Ensure you understand the responsibilities placed on each party – the vendor and the agency – during both deployment and ongoing operations. Additionally, include language that safeguards data ownership even if the collaboration tool is rolled back or removed from your infrastructure. This might require creating a data migration plan upfront, to ensure your agency retains its data after the tool is removed.

Interoperability

The goal of collaboration tools is not just to connect people, but also to connect other tools and information that they use to get their jobs done. To achieve that goal, your solution should integrate with other agency systems without sacrificing functionality or security, and without placing a significant burden on your IT administrators to orchestrate.

For the program manager or frontline employee, it may be difficult to independently determine if a potential tool meets these standards. That's why it's most critical to work with your agency's IT and acquisitions departments to thoroughly vet a product and acquire it through proper procedures. Shadow IT – the application of tools and systems that aren't authorized by an agency for use – are most likely to present security, contracting or interoperability challenges that prevent collaboration tools from proving their real value.

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Granicus offers a platform of secure, built-for-government solutions that help modern government organizations digitize their otherwise inefficient and cumbersome processes. Trusted by over 4,000 organizations around the world, modern governments are benefiting from time and cost savings, freeing up more time for person-to-person interactions and the ability to enhance the level of civic engagement and accessibility for citizens.

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Industry Spotlight

Increasing Efficiencies With Automated, Streamlined Processes

An interview with Jay Vickers, General Manager of Legislative Solutions at Granicus

Increasing demands and shrinking budgets across government have prompted a search for more efficient and cost-effective ways of operating. A growing movement is attempting to address these concerns by equipping employees with the necessary tools and resources that enable them to shift from doing manual, administrative tasks to higher-value work that is directly tied to agencies' missions. This is especially true for clerks, who in many ways are the lifeblood of local government.

Clerks are the often overlooked backbone of government. Tasked with a number of responsibilities such as managing legislative meetings, administering local elections and ensuring municipal records are readily accessible to the public, it's no wonder that clerks are pressed for time and resources. In addition to their many roles, they are also under immense pressure; one mistake can lead to a public disaster. Oftentimes, clerks have dozens of daily tasks to complete but never enough time.

During a recent interview with GovLoop, Jay Vickers, General Manager of Legislative Solutions at Granicus, discussed the specific challenges that clerks face, how clerks define productivity and how technology is empowering them to be more efficient and effective. Granicus specializes in empowering modern, digital governments with the latest in cloud technology to carry out a number of tasks, including agenda and legislative management.

Vickers has worked with hundreds of clerks to identify their biggest challenges, with the consensus indicating time as the biggest roadblock in completing their tasks. "A lot of times they're looking for any tools that can help them get more hours in a day," Vickers said. They're just so rushed, so time constrained that they don't have the opportunity to give each [task] the level of attention they really want to."

To overcome these challenges, Vickers recommended two solutions: converting manual, paper-based processes to automated, electronic ones and conducting procedure reviews of workplaces. When combined, these methods have worked wonders for clerk's offices, including those in Pinellas County, Florida; Keene, New Hampshire; and North Richland Hills, Texas.

"We see a lot of customers who try to reactively solve problems but end up bloating their processes and slowing down workflows," Vickers said. "Oftentimes, processes are not well documented and not a single person in the organization can describe them."

Vickers explained this as an internal disconnect between departments, saying that each person rarely understands the processes in their entirety, especially tasks that happen before or after their own responsibilities. One example is the disjointed process that many governments use to approve agenda items for board meetings.

"We're able to help them document and understand their processes," Vickers said. "Then we can find redundancies and opportunities for efficiency. We combine this strategic procedure review with electronic processing so that offices can know exactly where information is throughout the process."

The results back up Vickers' claims: In Florida's Pinellas County, agenda item approval time was reduced by 75 percent, from three months down to three weeks. Additionally, meetings went entirely paperless. Similar results were seen in North Richland Hills, Texas. Using Granicus' meeting and agenda software suite, the city saved one full day in preparation and assembly per public meeting, as well as paper savings of 12,000 sheets each month — or 18 trees every year — from not printing town hall agendas.

In addition to all of the time, money and paper that these changes can save, Vickers also believes that using streamlined, automated processes will allow for a significant increase in public interaction. Keene, New Hampshire is an example of that. Employees there saw a 65 percent reduction in time spent handling public meeting inquiries after putting more legislative information online in an accessible and searchable format. Even more impactful is that 90 percent of those inquiries were made self-service, which allows the public to access information quickly and conveniently and fosters citizen engagement.

As demands on government increase and resources diminish, changes must be made to accommodate citizens and government employees alike. The required increase in efficiency can be achieved by introducing automated processes and better managing procedures in governments across the country. Agencies will be more capable of achieving their missions, citizens will be able to increase interactions with government and clerks everywhere will be empowered to better manage time before, during and after meetings.

The Role of Automation

Automation is broadly defined as any "technique, method, or system of operating or controlling a process by highly automatic means, as by electronic devices, reducing human intervention to a minimum." In other words, automation is any means by which human input is reduced in a process.

It's important to understand this broad definition, because it speaks to how widely adaptable automation can be. While automation was in the past commonly associated with more mechanical or manufacturing processes, it is increasingly applied to other disciplines – most notably, information technology.

For instance, it's now routine for developers, IT operations teams or security professionals to run changes to applications through an automated testing environment before pushing changes into production. That environment automatically processes code to check it for errors in configuration or integration, allowing those professionals to identify and mitigate errors before they can impact a service.

That's just one example of how automation is dramatically increasing the productivity of personnel, while also improving outcomes and reducing risk. Other applications of automation in government include:

Paper-based processing

One of the most talked-about uses of automation in the public sector is to reduce paper-based processes and forms. In fact, going paperless has been part of the President's Management Agenda to Modernize Government for the 21st Century for nearly 10 years. Automation can do more, however, than simply translate paper documents and forms into digital formats. It can also power the processes behind those services, extending their reach without taxing public servants. For instance, the Social Security Administration used automation to digitize and translate its forms into multiple languages, allowing it to serve non-English speaking users through the Multi-Language Gateway.

Constituent relations

Automation, coupled with machine learning or artificial intelligence, provides agencies a new way to interact with and serve constituents. Specifically, chatbots are upping the customer service game for government. In 2015, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services launched "Emma," a virtual assistant that directs website users to online services. The Army also uses a chatbot, "Sgt. Star," to answer questions on the service's recruiting website GoArmy.com, and Los Angeles has a City Hall Internet Personality, or "Chip," to answer city questions. These automated services not only give users easy access to government information; they also save public servants significant time when they replace costly and time-consuming phone calls or e-mail chains to provide service.

Data collection and analysis

Especially on the state and local levels, agencies are increasingly deploying sensors and other devices to autonomously collect data from the environment, constituents and infrastructure. Rather than deploying field workers to manually collect information, agencies can ingest that data in real-time to a central, in-house location. This practice, broadly called the Internet of Things, saves significant time while increasing the accuracy of collected information. For instance, San Diego has installed streetlight sensors to collect information about parking spaces, gunshots and air pollution. In that city, officials plan to make the information publicly available and to allow software developers to build apps that use the data.

Contracting

Acquisitions are one part of government work that is known for delays, often due to complex and detail-oriented processes that take significant time to manually process. Automation to do things like validate vendor eligibility or monitor contract provisions for women-owned or small businesses can dramatically increase time-to-award. The General Services Administration has explored several pilots for automation in acquisitions that highlight its potential. One test used automation to pull vendor offers from various websites and populate that information into a templated pre-negotiation memo within 20 seconds. That process takes contracting officers about 22 minutes to complete without automation.

Tackling Cultural Aversion to Automation

There are multiple misconceptions about automation that can hinder adoption of new tools and processes. Specifically, many professionals worry that automation will diminish or replace their roles. To counter this cultural aversion, agency leaders should follow these four steps before implementing automated solutions:

Confront these fears.

Especially if you are leading the charge toward automation, you might be inclined to circumvent employees' concerns in an attempt to make progress. Automated solutions will only be effective, however, if personnel understand their purpose and commit to using them. To gain buy-in, it's important to listen to personnel, learn their fears and – most importantly – let them know the leadership team is considering them in the decision to pursue automation.

Counter with data.

As one Fast Company article notes, "In the absence of clear, factual communication, people tend to create their own information about the change, and rumors become facts." Get ahead of misconceptions by offering clear explanations about automation, its use and its impact. The easiest way to create fact-based communication is through data. For instance, you might note to personnel that a 2017 McKinsey study found that less than 5 percent of jobs could be fully replaced by automation.

Emphasize intent.

In any major transition, it is critical to offer context about why change is needed. The same is true when it comes to implementing automated processes. Project leaders should clearly identify the problem (e.g., heavy workloads, unsatisfied constituents or error-prone procedures) that an automated solution will solve. Use that messaging to focus your team on the intent of automation, rather than potential concerns.

Highlight opportunity.

In addition to the direct benefits of automation like increased productivity or reduced errors, it's important to offer a wider frame to your employees. Specifically, call out how automation offers an opportunity to dedicate less energy to manual and turnkey tasks. Instead, they can focus on more complex and challenging tasks that let them use their creativity and other skills to their fullest.

Conclusion

Today, productivity is an imperative for government. But, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, especially when you consider the variety of missions, regulations and resources that make up government organizations. To increase performance, outcomes and efficiency at your agency, it's critical to understand both your individual circumstances and the wealth of tactics available to help meet productivity goals.

This guide offers an overview of available strategies and technologies to enhance productivity, but it does not mandate one approach. It's up to frontline public servants to determine what meets their agency needs and ultimately helps them support the mission of government effectively and efficiently.

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 270,000 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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Thank You

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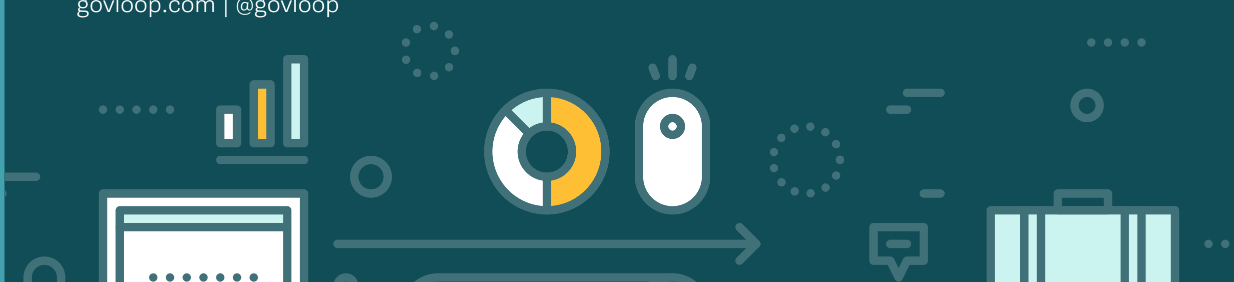

Appendix: More Project Management Resources

Check out these additional resources for strategies and tips to implement new project management approaches at your agency.

Waterfall

- **Bringing Agile Benefits to a Waterfall Project** – This article outlines how government can use simulations to bring the flexibility of the agile methodology to traditional project management.
- **Blending Agile and Waterfall** – This study outlines the potential of a successful integration of traditional and agile project management.
- **Waterfall Case Study** – This California case study demonstrated how the waterfall approach is most useful for large-scale, long-term projects.

DevOps

- **Your Guide to DevOps in Government** – This GovLoop guide is the perfect resource for organizations that want to learn more about DevOps. The comprehensive guide provides tactical instruction and advice from government DevOps experts that will help organizations build a DevOps team and measure their success.
- **Intro to DevOps for Project Managers** – A webinar and slide deck that is specifically designed for project managers who are interested in adopting the DevOps approach. The resource includes tips for managing time and team members.
- **Introduction to DevOps Course** – This online course was designed for anyone who is curious about DevOps. In three lessons, participants will learn the benefits of DevOps and the main components of the methodology.
- **Breaking Down the Walls in Government DevOps** – A webinar that addresses the inevitable culture change that comes with implementing a DevOps methodology. It also provides tools for integrating DevOps into agency operations.

Human-Centered Design

- **Usability Evaluation Methods** – A webpage that is intended to help organizations create human-centered products. This site details the different ways to test usability such as interviews, focus groups and eye-tracking software.
- **Design Kit: Human-Centered Design** – This resource covers all of the nuances of human-centered design. The "Mindsets" tab explores the philosophy behind the approach, while the "Methods" tab serves as a step-by-step guide to implementing human-centered design.
- **Civil Service Design: Tools and Tactics** – This NYC government webpage is a collection of tools and resources for government organizations that are seeking to mitigate risk and increase impact through human-centered design.

Agile

- **Project Ownership: The Key to Successful Agile Transformation in Government** – A GovLoop guide that encourages a shift from project management to project ownership when implementing agile methodology.
- **Successful Agile in Government: Supporting the Product Owner** – As part of their Agile in Government series, this Deloitte article defines the importance of the product owner's (PO) role in implementing an Agile approach as well as the difference between POs and project managers.
- **How to Overcome Cultural Resistance to Agile in Government** – Resistance to change is inevitable, especially in government. This webinar has tips to help your team accept the Agile approach and adjust to a different methodology.
- **The Ultimate Guide to Agile** – This multi-chapter guide provides an overview of the Agile approach and explains the potential benefits of implementing Agile methodologies.

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