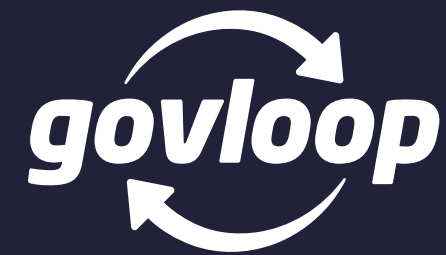# How to Challenge Assumptions at Work

Quick-Tips Resource

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Introduction

At some point in your career, you've probably shared an idea for cutting red tape and bringing your agency into the modern age, only to be told that it can't be done.

In some cases, the problem is a written policy. But other times, it isn't. Instead, it's a limiting belief — an unwritten rule or assumption that isn't found in policy. Or it's a belief that has crept into the fabric of your agency.

That's why we put together this quick-tips resource — to provide practical ways for you and your colleagues to challenge assumptions. We explain how you can identify, challenge and correct this way of thinking in different scenarios. Let's dive in!

3 Things You Can Do Today

Here are three how-tos for using ideation methods to challenge assumptions and limiting beliefs:

1. Identify

Take action: Identify assumptions and ask open-ended questions.

Example: We believe that's impossible to do because of time and cost constraints. How do we know this?

2. Challenge

Take action: Assume that you can overcome and challenge all assumptions.

Example: Ask "In what ways could this not be true?" and "What if we could do this twice as well in half the time?"
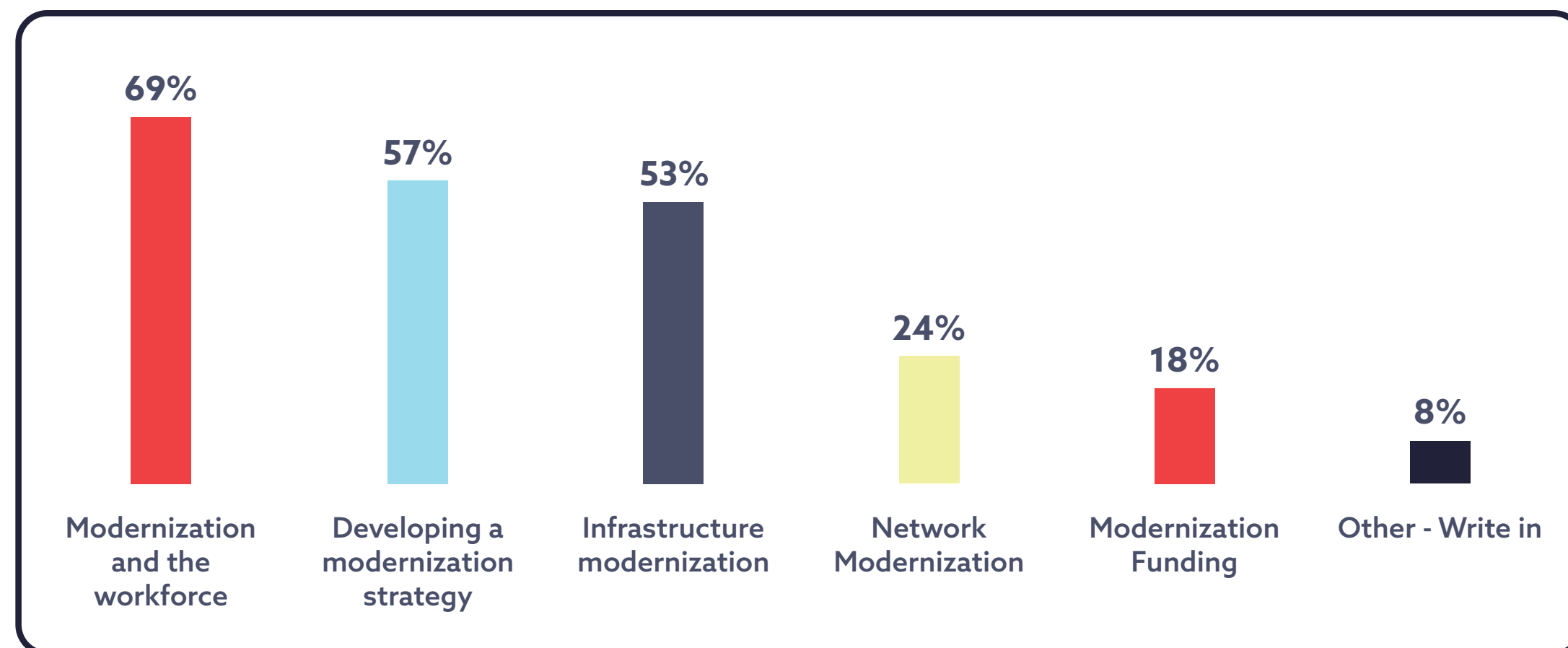
3. Make it real

Take action: Asking questions can move you from idea to buy-in from colleagues and even senior leaders.

Example: Using experimentation, explore viable ways of addressing the challenge.

Assumptions Can Hinder Modern Governments

Modernization in government is about more than technology. We asked the GovLoop community back in December 2019 what aspect of this topic they wanted to learn about. Not surprising, the answer was people.

69%					
	57%	**53%**			
			24%	**18%**	**8%**
Modernization and the workforce	Developing a modernization strategy	Infrastructure modernization	Network Modernization	Modernization Funding	Other - Write in

In the following slides, we use the "list, challenge, make it real" approach to show how you can address limiting beliefs in key areas around modernization:

Project responsibilities

Hiring requirements

Cost savings

Conducting user research

Key Issue: Project Responsibilities

Tips from:

Nikki Lee, *Product Manager, 18F, General Services Administration*

Identify the assumption

Nontechnical teams in government cannot successfully lead technology projects.

Challenge it

Acknowledge that everybody on the team is holding a piece of the bigger picture. The goal is to have program and IT staff acting like a true team.

Make it real

For technical employees: Continuously reinforce with your coworkers that you need input from program staff.

For nontechnical employees: Help technical staff understand the mission and the program priorities.

Key Issue: Hiring Requirements

Tips from:
Bill Hunt, *technology-policy enthusiast*

Identify the assumption

The most qualified job candidates have degrees.

Challenge it

Thinking this way limits the diversity of your candidate pool and viewpoints across the workforce.

Make it real

Don't overlook the people who don't align with your perceptions of the right candidate.

Key Issue: Cost Savings

Tips from:

Bryan Shone, *PhD, Director of Policy, Resources and Analysis in the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Headquarters Department of the Army*

Identify the assumption

The primary goal of digital modernization is to reduce costs.

Challenge it

Just as it takes a reprioritization of resources to modernize an aircraft or a tank, the same is true when modernizing digital infrastructure.

Make it real

Focus on divesting legacy systems and underperforming programs to free up resources for modernized capabilities.

Key Issue: Conducting User Research

Tips from:

Cyd Harrell, *independent civic design consultant and author of "A Civic Technologist's Practice Guide"*

Identify the assumption

Government agencies can't do user research.

Challenge it

Missed opportunities to connect with constituents around the service that you're building or providing can have negative impacts.

Make it real

Be transparent about your protocols, what questions you're going to ask and how you'll do it, how people can opt out, and more.

Navigating the Federal Intelligent Process Revolution

The government operates a variety of legacy, homegrown and non-standard technology. Coordinating and orchestrating information flows across these systems can make digital transformation difficult.

"As a FedRAMP moderate approved solution, Bizagi specializes in intelligent process automation solutions. Our offerings help agencies and enterprises worldwide design and implement end-to-end workflows that can transform everything from back-office processes to constituent-facing services."

- Drew Jaehnig, Industry Practice Leader, Public Sector

The Bizagi platform can help agencies modernize the following:

- Executive requests
- Purchase orders
- Workers Compensation
- Claims
- Audits
- Approvals

- Inventory
- Permitting and licensing
- Retirement benefits management
- Medical records requests
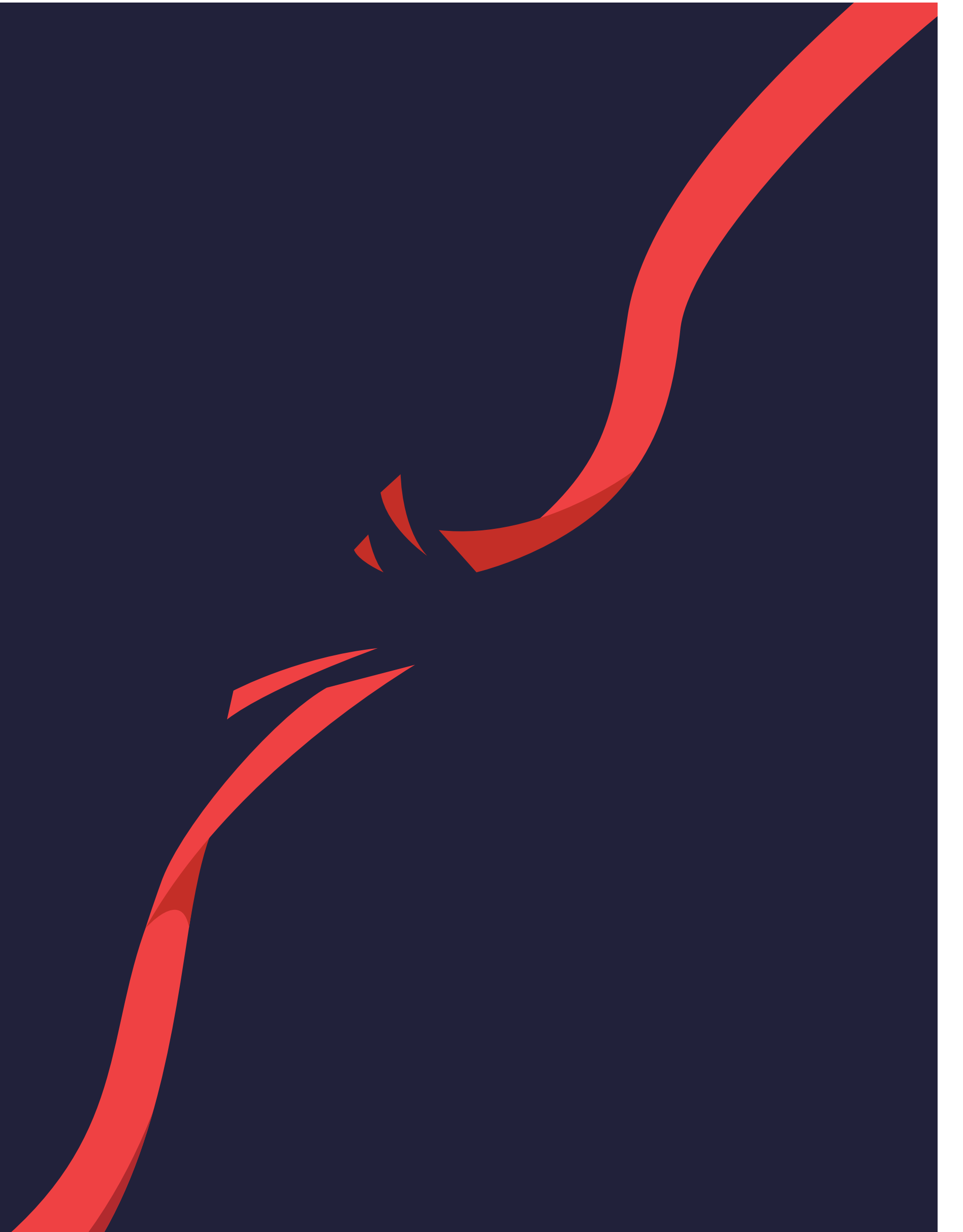- Emergency responses

For more information, visit www.bizagi.com
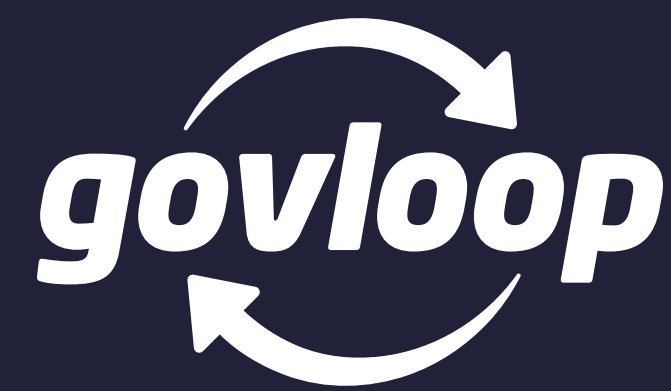
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Next Steps...

We hope that you found this resource helpful. To explore these and other tips in greater depth, make sure to download our GovLoop guide, "Agency of the Future: Common Misconceptions Holding You Back and How to Break Free."

In it, you'll find the full interviews with government leaders and gain practical tips for evaluating team effectiveness, communicating shared values across your team and modernizing in a crisis.

Thank you to Bizagi for their support of this valuable resource for public sector professionals.