**Public Sector Program Management**

**A Vision for 2039**

**Advice to Our Grandchildren**

**We stand on the shoulders of our parents and grandparents. Our children will one day stand on our shoulders. The best we can hope for is to leave them a world that is better than that which we inherited, teach them to learn, and offer a few words of advice. After that we all we can do is stand back and watch. God willing they will do better than we did.**

**Problem.** How will Federal, state, and local governments effectively deliver services in 2039 given:

1. technology advances that we cannot even imagine today;
2. cultural changes that may very well exceed the cultural changes have occurred in the last 100 years; and
3. resource, environmental, and economic challenges that could potentially disrupt world stability like we have not seen since World War II?

We can no longer assume that American technical, cultural, and resource advantages will always sustain America.

Because of the wide ranging impacts that public sector management has it is imperative that we strive as a nation to create management systems that are creative, adaptable, and high-performing. American public sector program management must:

1. evolve as fast as technology advances permit;
2. adapt to our emerging culture; and
3. encourage economic growth which is more resource efficient and environmentally responsible.

**Discussion.**

**Historical Perspective.** A federal worker retiring today likely started their career in a workplace that either had no computing capacity or computing capacity tied directly to a remote main frame computer; top-down management; and environmental controls were in their infancy. America was still locked in a Cold War with the Soviet Union.

A new federal worker today has likely not been exposed to main frame computers, top-down management styles, read Silent Spring. They would remember the Soviet Union and Cold War as part of some history class lesson or in stories told to them by their parents or grandparents.

**Recommendations.**

The following are broad recommendations for the men and women who will be creating public sector management systems between today and 2039.

1. Change
   1. Change is inevitable. Embrace it, manage it, and most of all lead it.
   2. Revolution is necessary. Encourage revolution and revolutionaries. Step aside if your heart is not with the revolution.
2. Culture
   1. Embrace diversity. Actively seek staff with unique cultural and work experiences.
   2. Remember history. Encourage a sense of organizational memory and history to create a sense of self identity. Ensure that staff know why the organization was created, why it exists today, and why it is important to society.
   3. Drive out fear. Create a culture that makes people feel valued and at ease. This will allow staff to focus on their work rather trying to keep their job.
   4. Treat bureaucracy like a cancer. If bureaucracy is allowed to infect an organization it will grow until it kills the reason that the organization was created.
   5. The least shall be first. Create a culture that encourages the lowest to worker to speak freely to the highest manager as an equal. Avoid organizational barriers that discourage free communication. Always greet the janitor and the intern.
3. People
   1. Value people. A high motivated workforce will suffer hardship, low pay, and long hours with pride if they feel valued.
   2. Empower people. Empower and encourage people to be creative, passionate about their chosen vocation[[1]](#footnote-0).
   3. Reward success and accept failure. Progress requires both success and failure. Managers should strongly reward success and drive out fear of failure.
   4. Always train staff to think critically, how to learn but teach fleeting skills only when necessary. Training should focus on increasing staff’s ability to learn and evolve. Limit training to on specific technology, software, and systems only to what is necessary to solve immediate problems.
   5. Demand more from yourself. Always demand more from yourself than your staff.
4. Technology
   1. Technology as a tool. We often seek to make technology the solution rather than recognizing that technology is only a tool which must be wielded by skilled workers. Computer systems can no more solve a problem than a hammer can build a house. Computers and hammers are only useful in the hands of a skilled worker.
   2. Beware of overreach. Just because technology can perform a task does not mean it is right, just or useful to perform that tasks. Tracking every phone call in America may be possible but does it make America a better place?
   3. Don’t feed the beast. Avoid the tendency to create data systems that require constant feeding without an observable value to the staff required feed the systems.
   4. Use technology for its intended job. It has been said that a technology is first used to do the old job and only later used to do the job it was intended to do. When adopting a new technology redesign the task to take full advantage of the new technology.

About the author - The author has 28 years of experience in federal service including 9 years as a Federal manager. He has worked in various aspects of environmental engineering including: site remediation, technology transfer, regulatory analysis, and technology development. He has a granddaughter and grandson who will be entering the workforce in approximately 2036.

1. Vocation is chosen over job or career in this use because we believe federal managers should encourage workers to adopt a strong sense of calling, mission and purpose in their work. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)