Looking Back to Move Forward:

Federal Management Leadership Under Five Presidencies

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We are pleased to provide this report on government-wide management leadership of the federal government, drawn from a forum held in Washington, DC in late May 2014.

The forum featured leaders of federal management from five Presidencies from Ronald Reagan through Barack Obama. These officials served as the chief management officers with the Office of Management and Budget during these Administrations.

Recognizing that managing the federal enterprise is a partnership with federal departments and Congress, we were delighted to also have leaders of several federal agencies as well as the former Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the most recent former Comptroller General responsible for leading the Government Accountability Office.

The lessons learned about managing the far flung commitments of the federal government are always timely, but particularly so in a year when the performance of government has become a more salient feature of public dialogues and debate. The full forum was captured on video which can be accessed at http://www.vimeo.com/centersonthepublicservice.

The forum and this report were made possible with the support of our co-sponsors – Oliver Wyman and the National Academy of Public Administration. We also received a generous grant from Public Financial Publications, Inc., which publishes the *Public Budgeting and Finance Journal*. Jonathan Breul was instrumental in planning the forum and developing the report, with the assistance of Tim Higashi, Kylie Rotton, Carrie Drummond, Aaron Kestner, Megan O'Dell, and Tonya Neaves.

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Founder and Director

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Executive Summary

George Mason University's Centers on the Public Service, with the School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs, Oliver Wyman, the National Academy of Public Administration, and Public Financial Publications, Inc., sponsored a forum to encourage a dialogue about management improvement efforts by recent presidential administrations and draw some lessons learned. The leaders of management improvement efforts during the Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama Administrations, were invited to offer their insight. Their dialogue shows there has been significant progress over time, and that there is considerable agreement on the way forward.

There was remarkable congruence on a number of points. First, there is greater need for every administration to establish a management framework. The greater range of federal programs has served to increase the stakes associated with federal programs while at the same time making implementation more demanding and complex. The governance challenges increasingly transcend the boundaries of individual programs and demand more crosscutting and rigorous implementation.

Not surprisingly, the former Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Deputy Directors for management uniformly agreed that OMB has to be involved in establishing and implementing this management framework, while adding that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as an important partner. At the same time, they agreed that the federal budget was the principal management tool and that Congress, as the federal board of directors, needed to pass meaningful legislation that assured priority and a legislative structure for addressing management issues. In terms of the management agenda, they all seemed to agree that accountability and transparency of results were key—goals and metrics were essential.

There was general agreement that the federal government should move towards cross-agency goals and measures and that the framework established in the 2010 Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act was correct is this regard.

Finally, there was consensus that each administration should build on the management initiatives of prior administrations. While political platforms will differ, each administration nonetheless is held accountable for managing the complex federal enterprise and blamed if problems occur on its watch. Managing government effectively and efficiently is a challenge that calls on common skills and wisdom by leaders regardless of their political brand.

Introduction

Every administration comes into the White House thinking it will reform the way government operates and save billions of dollars. Presidents, however, often don't care about the details of management until it's too late. Failing to "faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States," can be politically fatal.[1]

The George Mason University's Centers on the Public Service, Oliver Wyman, the National Academy of Public Administration, and Public Financial Publications sponsored a forum to encourage a dialogue about management improvement efforts by recent administrations and draw some lessons learned. The leaders of "management" improvement efforts during the Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama Administrations were invited to offer their insight and commentary:

- In what ways were they able to make the government work better?
- What were their biggest accomplishments?
- What were their biggest disappointments?
- If they had a chance to do it again, what would they do differently?
- What lessons can we learn from this experience?

Their dialogue shows that, even while many significant problems remain, there has been significant progress over time, and that there is considerable agreement on the way forward.

[1] Donald F. Kettl, *The Reluctant Executive*, *Government Executive*, May 9, 2014.

Participants

Introduction: Lessons for Federal Managers

- Beth Cobert, Deputy Director for Management, Barack Obama Administration

First Panel: How has "Management" Worked in the Past

- Joseph Wright, Director and Deputy Director, Ronald Reagan Administration
- Frank Hodsoll, Deputy Director for Management, George H. W. Bush Administration
- Clay Johnson, Deputy Director for Management, George W. Bush Administration
- Edward DeSeve, Deputy Director Management, Bill Clinton Administration, and Special Advisor to the President for Recovery Implementation, Barack Obama Administration

  David Walker (Moderator), Former Comptroller General

Second Panel: What are Lessons for the Future

- Mort Downey, Deputy Secretary of Transportation, Bill Clinton Administration
- Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Interior, George W. Bush Administration
- Tom Davis, former Congressman and Chairman of the House Government Reform Committee

  Don Kettl (Moderator), University of Maryland School of Public Policy Professor

Background

Presidents do not come into office to reform the management of the government, but oftentimes they quickly find that they have to address the way in which government operates if they want to achieve their policy goals. Paul Light has described these management initiatives as the "tides of reform." [2] He explains that "Watching the tides of reform can be just as fascinating as watching the tides of the ocean…Watching the tides is about more than aesthetics, however. It is also about asking how the tides vary over time, and whether the assorted pieces of reform actually add up to a more effective government."

During the Nixon Administration, the "M" for "Management" in OMB was inserted into the name of the reorganized Bureau of the Budget in 1970. The idea was to give prominence to the notion that the central budget agency in the Executive Branch should give as much time to improving the quality of management as it does to the preparation of the budget and development of Presidential policy. According to Shelley Tomkin, "OMB had struggled to find an appropriate place for its secondary role as a vehicle for Presidential control and management of an expanding executive branch. While a few success stories can be recounted from a number of administrations, it was still unclear whether any centralized presidential agency can improve the management of a federal workforce numbering in the millions, or if such an agency should be established apart from the currently existing OMB."[3]

President Ronald Reagan

President Ronald Reagan's support for the Grace Commission survey of waste in government led to his place as the champion of the war on waste and of strengthening the offices of Inspectors General. Reform '88 was the umbrella concept for a set of initiatives to reform federal management and administrative systems. The initial objectives mostly aimed at reducing costs and enhancing revenue collection and management, and Reform '88 emphasized economy, efficiency and accountability. Other elements included efforts to minimize agency fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

President George H. W. Bush

President George H. W. Bush won office by stressing the successes of the Reagan years and his ability to continue to build upon them. He pointed to his military service in World War II and his years of public service. He pledged to round out some of the harsher edges of the previous administration, stating that he wanted "a kinder and gentler nation." President Bush used his experience from years of government service in a variety of agencies to emphasize a series of management reforms. These included the first government-wide High Risk (including budget commitments to reduce risk), the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, the Vice President's leadership in regulatory reviews, SWAT and review team reviews, locality pay for federal employees, defense management reform, and renewed attention to performance measurement. The landmark 1990 deficit-reduction plan helped reverse a decade of budget deficits and gave the economy a boost that lasted for more than a decade.

[2] Paul C. Light, *The Tides of Reform: Making Government Work, 1945-1995* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), p. 1.

[3] Shelley L. Tomkin, *Inside OMB: Politics and Process in the President's Budget Office* (New York, M.E. Sharp, 1998), p. 202.

President Bill Clinton

President Bill Clinton took a different approach. He tasked Vice President Al Gore with the responsibility of "reinventing" the government. Gore's task force of career federal employees developed a set of recommendations after a six-month study, but the implementation effort spanned the full eight years of Clinton's presidency. The National Performance Review (NPR) effort claimed a number of accomplishments that reflected the dual nature of the effort. On the "*costs less*" front, the NPR also claimed more than $136 billion in savings from its efforts. NPR claimed that its efforts had led to a reduction in the size of the federal workforce of 426,200, the passage of 90 pieces of legislation, the elimination of 250 obsolete programs, the reduction of 640,000 pages of unnecessary internal regulations, and the elimination of another 16,000 pages of regulations affecting the public and businesses. On the "*works better*" front, the reinvention effort claimed that in surveys of citizen trust in the federal government, results had more than doubled during the course of the Clinton Administration—from 21 percent to 44 percent—as measured by a long-standing survey conducted by the University of Michigan.

President George W. Bush

As the first "MBA president", George W. Bush made better management and performance of the federal government a plank in his campaign platform. He acted on it early in his Administration by developing the "*President's Management Agenda*" to improve agency-level management capacity and program-level performance and results. He maintained a consistent focus on the core elements of this agenda over the course of his entire administration, with OMB playing the central role in driving common initiatives across the agencies. His key initiatives included an agenda to improve agency management capacity, red-yellow-green stop-light scorecard for following the implementation of the agenda, and a Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process to rate the management and effectiveness of all major programs (an effort to tie management and budgeting decisions more closely).

President Barack Obama

Like his predecessors, President Barack Obama also has found the need to adopt a management agenda. Focused on delivering a 21st century government, the agenda has four themes: *effectiveness* - delivering better, faster, smarter services to citizens and businesses; *efficiency* - increasing quality and value in the government's core administrative functions; *economic growth* - opening government funded data and research to the public to spur innovation and economic growth; and *people and culture* - unlocking the full potential of the federal workforce and building the workforce the government needs for the future. The Administration built on the performance, financial management and other management initiatives pursued by previous administrations, but with several important differences. When compared to the George W. Bush Administration, the Obama management program was more decentralized, focused on agency priority goals rather than compliance with government wide criteria. Moreover, the Administration place greater emphasis on evaluation, evidenced based policy and the coordination of cross cutting policies across agencies under the rubric of the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010.

First Panel of
<u>Chief Management Officers</u>

Introduction

Paul Posner introduced Beth Cobert, the current OMB deputy director for management, who was still new to her job, having arrived only six months ago on the eve of the 2013 government shutdown. She said she was here to listen and learn from her predecessors. Yet, as she explained, some of the issues the Administration is wrestling with are the same as they were in the past. One of the central conclusions she and her staff drew from a thorough review of efforts underway here and abroad is that to have successful performance and management, you need to have clear objectives, data, accountability, and leadership engagement. Those are all important things, but everyone would agree it is *how* you make things happen that is the question.

The Management Priorities of Presidents

Former Comptroller General, Dave Walker, moderated the panel that followed. Walker explained that the panel was about the management "M" in OMB. In 1921, two great agencies were formed: the Bureau of the Budget - now the Office of Management and Budget, and the General Accounting Office - now Government Accountability Office. To first find out about some past management experiences, he asked each of the individuals responsible for management in the past five administrations to answer two questions:

- On a one to ten scale, what priority was "management" during the Administration?
- What role did the President or Vice President play in the agenda?

Former OMB Director, and Deputy Director, Joe Wright answered that during the start of the Reagan Administration pure management was a "5." That has changed dramatically. For example, there was no deputy for management. They did not have the Internet. He explained that they could not check on the data and information provided by the agencies. Nor did they have information about what it cost to achieve some of the goals. The President was involved, but you had to do it in such a way where he would stay interested, and to do that, you had to appeal to the political and public relations staff.

Frank Hodsoll was the first deputy director for management during the George H. W. Bush Administration. He gave President Bush a "7 or 8" and noted the personal involvement of the Vice President in regulatory review. He pointed out that the President has assured passage of the landmark Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 and signed the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. He also assured in his budget resources for dealing with high risk areas. Hodsoll noted, however, that the Bush Administration had not been able to achieve program level institutionalization of performance measurement. There remains a tendency of program managers to rely on central management units to do performance measurement for them. The Bush Administration was, on the other hand, able to engage many deputy secretaries into the management area, and created the Federal Accountant Standards Advisory Board to start the process for federal accounting standards.

Ed DeSeve who was Deputy Director for Management during the Clinton Administration (and Special Advisor to the President for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act during the Obama Administration) answered: “We were in the infrastructure building business during the Clinton Administration. The Government Performance and Results Act had only been enacted then. I can only say good things about what Clay did and what Beth is doing. We had to be at that second stage along the way, enabling the third and ultimately the fourth stage going forward.”

Clay Johnson, Deputy Director for Management for President George W. Bush, answered that if you asked the President, he would say a “5.” He bet if you asked a deputy secretary or someone at OMB they would say an “8.” The reason was power of the “scorecard” the George W. Bush Administration used to assess program-by-program practices. They were willing to take the “heat” associated with all the transparency and accountability for the results because it was really, really important to do so. The President would even talk to individual cabinet members about their scorecard.

Taking a Long Term Perspective in Designing Management Reforms

Joe Wright said that there is always a risk that the management initiatives will be seen by the next administrations as political initiatives or part of the campaign. That is something OMB has to fight against to keep making progress. He suggested that management initiatives need to focus on something that will last and include a tracking system to monitor progress in a transparent manner.

Clay Johnson argued that there is a need to institutionalize the management process to ensure that initiatives make lasting contributions to governance. “We can’t be transparent enough, accountable enough, and goal-oriented enough,” he said. Sustaining reforms beyond a single administration not only means building institutions in OMB and the agencies to sustain management programs but also to establish a focus within the Congress. Research has found that those reforms that last are often anchored in statutes which communicate to agency officials that reforms will not expire when an administration leaves or moves on to other priorities.[4]

Dave Walker concluded that the panelists documented how much has been accomplished by succeeding administrations on major management functions, building on each other’s work over the years.

Defining a Management Agenda for the Next Administration

David Walker then asked each panelist to address two questions:

- What do you see as the one or two largest challenges which have to be met in the management area?
- To what extent does Congress have to do something to effectively deal with those challenges?

[4] Paul C. Light, *The Tides of Reform: Making Government Work, 1945-1995* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977).

Joe Wright said that OMB should work with the new administration and take the best that has been done before and make sure it continued. This should take into account the new President's priorities, involve GAO, and develop a plan to get Congressional interest going forward to get Congress to not only do budget and appropriations bills, but management reviews. You only have 2 ½ years.

David Walker clarified that the appropriate people in Congress need to be actively engaged as the process is going on, rather than after the reports are issued in a reactive posture. To which Joe Wright responded that this is not just the Executive Branch's responsibility. Congress is the board of directors and they ought to act like it.

Clay Johnson suggested that Congress can craft legislation so the goals are formalized and institutionalized, so that when an administration comes into office they can see that it is the goal to make an agency to work like this, or better. In other words, this is what this agency, this program is working to accomplish. A new administration doesn't start off at zero. It starts with what had been agreed to between Congress and the previous administration. They inherit real accountability and transparency and they have to change it formally if they intend to do something differently.

Frank Hodsoll said federal government is, in part, a political process. One needs to pick a few issues where the stars are aligned. Congressional management committees lack clout. One can use scandal and High Risk areas to get political attention. One also needs to get buy-in on performance measures from the constituents, not just agency and OMB officials. Appropriators and authorizers will pay less attention otherwise.

Reforms in the Process for Defining Program and Management Priorities

Ed DeSeve said that the primary management process of the federal government should be the budget process. The budget process is so fundamentally broken that is impossible to think of it as such. We need to go back to the budget process and add to it the kind of performance reviews that have been instituted selectively in the past, so that Congress is forced to consider performance data. We have to connect resources and results, in the budget process, which is the most meaningful process we have – by legislation.

Dave Walker reminded everyone that in the 62 years of his life Congress had only passed timely budget and appropriations bills, by the beginning of the fiscal year, four times. Continuing resolutions have become the "new normal" for funding agencies – a process that is formulaic and largely devoid of performance goals and metrics.

Joe Wright said the content of most legislation is not basically results-oriented. It is just front end – just put this money out and, oh-by-the-way, sometime we will see what you did with it.

Frank Hodsoll added that many of the goals in authorizing legislation are highly ambiguous or sometimes even in conflict. This makes it difficult to design outcome measures that reflect legislative intent.

Dave Walker articulated a framework for how resources should be linked to results. When we have a spending program or a tax preference, you ought to have a goal. What are we trying to accomplish? How do we measure success - so that we can understand over time what is working, what is not working, what should we do more of, what should be do less of, what should be killed, or what should be consolidated. In the absence of that, all you can do is spend more money, give new tax preferences, issue a new regulation, create a new agency, or create a new czar. And, you have to have outcomes, you have to link those outcome to performance metrics, institutionally, both at the unit and individual levels.

Ed DeSeve articulated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act there were five, very specific goals. The legislation should include some statement of the goals that are intended so that they can be measured.

Clay Johnson positioned that goals, accountability, active transparency - without that - all the government is doing is “working” at something for the American people. They can say they have been successful if they are merely “working on it,” which is not good enough. You have to make transparent the outcome goals and the performance relative to those goals to be able to tell the American people, “no kidding,” this is what’s working and what’s not.

Joe Wright argued a lot of people believe the job in government is “process.” To which Ed DeSeve added: “Process in their most important product.” It is fair to say that all participants believe that we can do far better than this going forward.

Second Panel of Congressional and Agency Officials

The second panel was convened to provide an agency and congressional perspective on government-wide management leadership.

Don Kettl, panel moderator indicated that the panel would address two different kinds of issues. One is how to deal with these issues from a Congressional perspective, and the way Congress can help, or sometimes not, the process of improving performance. Second is the process of front-line operations of the federal government. We will conclude with some ‘looking forward’ issues, including making the transition from this administration to the next.

Managing Performance in Divided Government

Tom Davis said that we need to get used to divided government. It is the “new normal.” It is a different dynamic. Since the committees with jurisdiction over management issues are also the investigative committees, Administrations have to learn to respond one day on investigations and come up to cut the deal on a bill the next day. The good news is that management issues are not inherently partisan. There is a lot of potential for administrations to take a punch on some issues and then work together on other issues. Davis suggested that the President needs reorganization authority to permit the President to re-arrange the Executive Branch to operate more efficiently, subject to an up or down vote in the Congress.

Davis further indicated that there are numerous opportunities for Congress and the Administration to have discussions on the management agenda. At the end of the day we should produce what we call win-win situations where everyone walks away accomplishing something the public wants to see.

Don Kettl asked Mort Downey and Lynn Scarlet to talk about how agency officials react to conflicting and confusing signals sent by the Congressional leadership and the President Management Agenda?

Mort Downey responded that it is akin to being between a rock and a hard place! The Department of Transportation got an agenda through by conveying their priority programmatic goals and then worked with both parties in Congress, as well as with key staff within the Department, to determine what it would take to get it done. Downey said that it isn’t enough to say that your initiatives are on the President’s Management Agenda; you have got to say how your proposals are going to make things better.

Lynn Scarlet said that the Department of the Interior’s mission stands at the intersection of people, land, water and wildlife which meant high potential for conflict with high stakes. She distinguished between the policy agenda and the management agenda. On a policy agenda with high conflict, there will be situations where you are not going to have everyone on the same page. But even in those situations, a focus on results was absolutely critical to conversations. What are we trying to accomplish? How is what we are proposing driving in that direction?

Pivoting to management, she indicated that the issues are less conflict-laden. Both parties want an efficient, effective government. However, the Department still had to make the case for fairly large investments in information technology or a financial management. How would these investments yield efficiency and transparency, and obtain support from Congress for the fairly hefty investment that was required to get that done. She reiterated the importance of results, results, results!

In a large Department like Interior, there were also bound to be internal conflict across the 70,000 people staffing the agency. Constant communication is the watchword to ensure a consistent message and engagement vertically throughout the layers, and horizontally across the bureaus. Ultimately, internal dissent can create problems when staff engages Congress and other external players in the issue.

Don Kettl asked whether “results” are relatively non-partisan. “Is that enough, in this contentious, divided government, to make things happen? Is this something we should be content to take place below the surface, to allow the broader political battles to happen and then try to pick our battles and find our victories where we can?”

Tom Davis responded that this has got to stay below the radar screen. If you elevate these to a certain level, partisanship kicks in. Lynn Scarlett agreed on one level that staying below the radar screen is advantageous. There are other issues, however (such as requests for significant resources to fund financial management improvement) where you have to take your agenda up to the Hill, pitch it and try to get across the finish line.

Mort Downey suggested that conversations should always be framed in the context of what are we really trying to achieve. Downey expressed a frustration about lack of consistency in the use of strategic planning for internal vs. external purposes. Inside the department, they used their strategic plan very heavily as an organizing principle for ten different agencies that have many things in common, even if they don’t want to admit it. This allowed the Secretary’s office to focus on what they wanted to achieve, such as safety, economic growth, environment and the like. However, externally on the Hill, there was no appetite to hear about that.

Integrating Performance and Budgeting

Don Kettl asked about the link between performance and budgeting, because if there is anything that comes through the long history of management reform it is the difficulty of bringing management and the budget together.

Mort Downey indicated that performance information and planning worked well in their budget discussions with OMB. These discussions helped the Administration figure out what would “sell” on the Hill.

Lynn Scarlett concluded that having clear management goals and information on results does have some bearing on OMB’s decision making. On the Hill, Scarlet says the impact of performance measures was more variable. Scarlet indicated that it was important to show how proposals such as information technology or financial management would move them closer to their performance goals. In other cases, like “competitive sourcing,” it does not.

Scarlett noted that “Public policy is about values. How does one prioritize those values and what value sets does one advance? Part of the purpose of Congress is to engage in that values dialogue and make the determination. I am not one of those who thinks that Congress should be out of the picture in making that determination of how monies ought to be spent. Yes, it is about performance, but it also about governing which reflects pursuing values.”

Don Kettl asked former Congressman Tom Davis to give advice about how managers and agencies should deal with this divided government. Davis indicated that communication between the Executive and Legislative branches is critical. He continued that “performance matters. When it comes to appropriation bills, it is a handful of staffers who write them. They are the ones who you have to talk to, where you are getting efficiencies, what works. It takes adept executive leadership to navigate through those. But at the end of the day, good communication can make up for a lot of the deficiencies we have in the process.”

The Implications of Transparency for Agency Management

Don Kettl discussed the recent rise of transparency on the agendas of Presidents and other political actors. He posed the question – “Does increased transparency put a target on your desk?”

Tom Davis responded that transparency is not a policy but rather a means to an end. Overall, he feels that government in the sunshine is a good thing.

From an agency perspective, Mort Downey perceives that transparency is critical. At the Department of Transportation, providing public information about how performance was the only real motivator for getting results. The agency issued performance reports religiously, regularly and honestly. Downey said: “We took our hits if we were going to take hits, but more often than not, we had a good message and that is the message we tried to play across the board.”

However, with the Hill, Downey said there was often not clear alignment between the goals of the department and the appropriations. While the department to set goals initially within the agency and the Administration, these had to be revised to reflect changes made in appropriations process.

Lynn Scarlett agreed that transparency is critical to internal management and results. Goals have to be clear within the organization, and results must be presented in a transparent way to promote accountability throughout the larger department. For any major initiative, the absence of transparency and clarity will come back home to roost.

Preparing for the Presidential Transition

Don Kettl raised the prospects for presidential transitions. What should a new Administration be thinking about and what advice can we provide from the panel on how a new team should move forward?

Mort Downey indicated that now new frameworks are needed at the agency level. However, there is a need to emphasize how a new team will deal with cross agency initiatives. Bringing several agencies together to focus on common overarching objectives is important yet among the most challenging tasks facing public managers.

Lynn Scarlett agreed that the critical 21st century management challenge is cross-agency coordination. She advised that coordination does not necessarily require centralization and/or re-organization. Rather cross agency collaboration calls for sustaining the personalities, the mission focus, and skill sets of individual agencies. What is needed are cross agency communication, data integration, and coordinative mechanisms.

Mort Downey reinforced the notion that moving boxes and restructuring agencies is not the right answer. Rather, it is far more cost effective to focus on better technology, moving data around and letting people communicate better. He said “Moving the boxes is not the right idea; it is connecting the boxes.”

When asked what they would tell a new President what they need to do, both Scarlett and Downey agreed that a few targets for success should be selected that can be achieved relatively quickly. Downey advised not to develop a big program at the outset.

Scarlett indicated that the targets chosen should link to known challenges. She advised: “You will have more traction if that problem is rooted in a high risk list or a major Inspector General report. Keep it simple, focused. Don’t dismiss what the previous administration has done. Look at those things which are on their way to success, and take hold and run with them.”

Concluding Observations

There was remarkable agreement on a number of points. First, there is greater need for every administration to establish a management framework. The greater range of federal programs has served to increase the stakes associated with federal programs while at the same time making implementation more demanding and complex. The governance challenges increasingly transcend the boundaries of individual programs and demand more crosscutting and rigorous implementation.

Not unsurprisingly, the former OMB deputy directors for management uniformly agreed that OMB has to be involved in establishing and implementing this management framework. The early OMB years played an important part in building the institutional infrastructure, building a platform where OMB could actually act responsibly with data on program delivery. The management oversight by OMB over the years has become increasingly sophisticated and meaningful, building on increasingly sophisticated technological advancement and capabilities. They also agreed that the GAO has to be an important partner. No one else can oversee the performance of the government to ensure that it operates as well as it can.

In terms of the management agenda, the panelists all seemed to agree that accountability for results was key. Goals and metrics were essential. And transparency for the results was emphasized time and time again. OMB officials and agency deputies were uniformly supportive of the framework established in the 2010 Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act - not only to have goals and measures, but to move now in developing cross-agency goals and measures.

Finally, there was consensus that each administration should build on the management initiatives of prior administrations. While political platforms will differ, each administration nonetheless should be held accountable for managing the complex federal enterprise and blamed if problems occur on their watch. Managing government effectively is a challenge that calls on common skills and wisdom by leaders regardless of their political brand.

A number of continuing challenges remain. Divided government was described as the “new normal.” Several times former Deputy Directors for Management seemed to ask the Congress to “act as the board of directors.” In the meantime, the former Deputy Secretaries advised federal officials to stick below the radar screen with management issues if they wanted to be successful. One particularly ambitious proposal was to consider inviting Members of Congress or staff to participate in management reviews with the departmental officials and OMB.

The deputy secretaries offered some advice regarding coordination. They wanted to make it clear that improved management was not about centralization or reorganization. Instead, it means improved cross-agency communication through technology, moving data, and coordinative mechanisms.

The deputy secretaries also made a strong case for communication, both up and down the hierarchy as well as across the organization. No management effort can succeed unless there is strong and consistent communication.

Finally, transition to the next administration is a certainty. The effort of transitioning-out should institutionalize the best of the management agenda, including by legislation. As they enter office, the new administration should build on the old. They will no doubt want to rename it, or tweak it. But aside from having it reflect in some fashion the President's priorities, the underlying institutional framework should be built upon, not abandoned.

OLIVER WYMAN

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