Fast Government: Generating Value and Driving Mission Effectiveness

By Charles L. Prow

What is the value of time? Is it measured in cost, in service levels, in quality? If a government agency could reduce claims processing time from over 300 days to less than 60 days, what would that be worth to the agency and those whom it serves? If a police force could provide officers with real-time information on crime incidents and suspects, what would that be worth? If an organization could save 10 percent annually by moving to a smarter, faster supply chain, would it be worth it? If an agency could dramatically reduce its collections department by using predictive analytics to identify improper payments before they were dispersed, what would that be worth? In fact, accelerating business processes is arguably the single largest driver of improved mission effectiveness in most government missions.

We see the value of time every day—in claims processing times, supply chains, lag-times from intelligence collection to analysis to action. In each of these cases, long cycle times mean higher costs, lower service levels, and diminished mission effectiveness. Making government work faster enhances mission effectiveness, improves service levels, and reduces costs. That simple but powerful premise is at the heart of *Fast Government.*

Fast Government was born from conversations with hundreds of government leaders following the publication of *Governing to Win* in 2012. The thread that ran through all of these conversations was the enormous value that the element of time represented. Speed, agility, real-time, rapid response— what all of these have in common is the relationship of time to mission effectiveness and value. *Governing to Win* set out to explore how our national competitiveness is directly related to how we improve the missions that are provided by government, while also reducing the overall cost of government.

Government organizations—and their people—are really driven by the value of the mission they support. What government leaders, and firms that serve government clients, really focus on are mission effectiveness and value. In *Governing to Win,* we introduced the concept that for government, mission effectiveness can be equated with value. This allows us to begin to measure value in such a way that it will start to inform and shape the activities within agencies. In *Governing to Win,* value is illustrated through a simple equation:

$$\text{Mission Value} = (\text{Quality} \times \text{Service}) / (\text{Cost} \times \text{Time}).$$

This value equation provides a clear definition of what generates value and what drives mission effectiveness.

We decided to further investigate the role of time in the value equation, and that is where the idea for *Fast Government* originated.

What Is Fast Government?

Fast Government examines the role of time in the mission value equation, and will focus on process innovation, disruptive technologies, predictive analytics, and other ways that leaders can make government processes work faster. Public-sector agencies can begin to fundamentally transform their processes through a focus on cycle time reduction and elimination of non-value added activities.

By fast, we mean:

- Making time a key performance metric in government efficiency and effectiveness initiatives

- Using technology and leveraging innovation to automate repetitive tasks

- Accelerating the delivery of government goods and services through process innovation that redesigns business processes to require fewer steps (such as moving from 10 signatures to three)

- Finding new ways to perform a given set of tasks more quickly (such as through the use of Lean Six Sigma where you can move from an assembly-line approach to a parallel process)

- Creating interactive services for citizens so they can solve their own problems, rather than having to ask the government for information and help (such as creating a nutrition website rather than sending out physical signs to be posted in school cafeterias)

- Using predictive analytics to reduce or eliminate entire processes (such as preventing improper payments from being made, thus reducing the need for resources to investigate and reclaim payments)

Moving to Fast Government

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet to unlocking the value of time. The tools at our disposal to reduce cycle times will be familiar to any student of government transformation efforts over the past several decades. At the heart of any effort to make government work faster will be a focus on three variables:

- People
- Process
- Technology

What *is* different is that government leaders can now make the decision to explicitly focus on *time* as one of the key
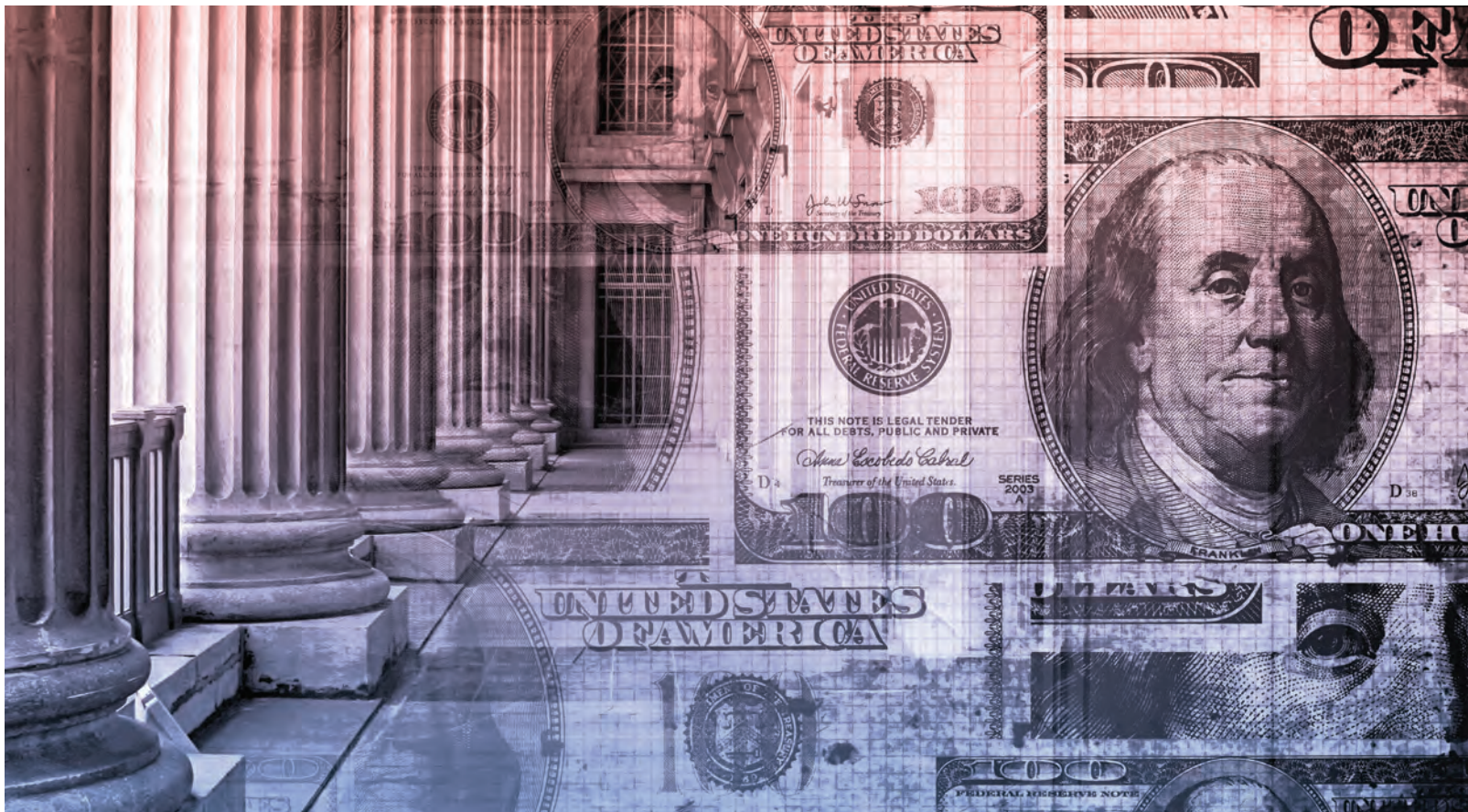
outcomes for improvement and transformation initiatives. Making the element of time part of the success criteria for initiatives sends a clear signal to agencies and departments.

Leaders should pay particular attention to the people aspect of initiatives to improve operations and reduce cycle times. People make government processes run. The most amazing technology in the world will not reduce cycle times and improve performance if the people who manage and support the processes imbedded in the technology do not know how to use the new systems or do not support their adoption. Stories are legion about employees who created manual workarounds rather than adopt new technologies — and about improvement initiatives that failed to deliver the predicted results because of resistance by employees.

So one of the key elements in implementing fast government approaches is ensuring employees are provided the skills and capabilities to succeed. But this is not enough. The must also be invested in understanding the "bigger picture." Government leaders must not only take an enterprise view for themselves, so they can see processes from end-to-end from the perspective of time and value, but also share this with employees so they too can see how their team contributes or connects to the efforts of others.

There are great examples of the power of fast government inside the processes of the federal government in areas such as claims and payment, supply chain, and emergency/disaster response. There are also great examples in the commercial sectors. What the best practices, gleaned from these public- and private-sector examples of organizational processes, share is that they provide clear lessons in how to increase mission effectiveness at a lower price point by making the variable of time the central governing factor in that transformational activity.

Of course, a key enabler to effective processes is the use of technology. When used appropriately, it can streamline operations and allow employees to shift from a focus on transactional processes to strategic insight and customer service. It can also be used strategically to analyze service patterns to identify wasteful processes that can be streamlined and reduce time and costs, such as in grant application processes. Increasingly, analytics are being used in government agencies to predict and prevent problems that can lead to costly wastes of time, as well, such as identifying improper payments in advance of making the payment and stopping them.

Time is an often overlooked variable in the value equation, but as the report contributors discuss, by focusing on making

government work faster, whether by redesigning processes, adopting new technology, or moving to embrace innovation and risk-taking, public-sector leaders can improve services and reduce costs. Drawing on the experiences of a diverse group of authors, from private-sector pioneers to career public servants, *Fast Government* provides real-world examples of how a focus on speed can transform government.

The Road Ahead

Achieving durable and lasting improvements in any organization, public or private, is one of the biggest challenges that leaders face. What stands between individual examples of excellence and widespread performance improvements are better governance and the application of the management discipline. Focusing on governance will allow best practices to be more broadly and more quickly adopted, which in turn will allow the government to operate more systemically.

Right now, there are numerous case studies describing how government is operating much more effectively. There are also case studies on the application of commercial capabilities to government. But how do you take those great examples and scale them in a way that will systematically change the cost structure of the federal government and do so without compromising mission effectiveness? That is the challenge we face today, and one that we explore in *Fast Government*.

Fast Government brings fresh insights and illuminating examples on how public-sector leaders, by focusing on time and speed, can deliver real and lasting benefits to our nation through increased mission effectiveness and lower costs. I hope you will gain as much as I did from reading the work of all the fine contributors. This forum offers you a glimpse of our larger effort. As you read these essays, I encourage you to think back to the question I posed at the beginning, "What is the value of time?" and to consider how doing things

faster (applications, business processes, approvals, etc.) could unlock value for your organization. How can the ideas within the book help you make a fast government?

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Excerpted from **Fast Government—Accelerating Service Quality While Reducing Cost and Time.** *See page 35 for more information on this special report made available from the Center.*