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A Time for Transformational Change

The summer of 2011 was dominated by negotiations between Congress and the president concerning the federal deficit and the need to dramatically reduce spending in the decade ahead. There is little doubt that agencies across government will need to cut costs while maintaining, if not improving, the performance of their operations. The challenge thus facing government executives will be whether to use this unprecedented opportunity to transform their organizations while also making necessary spending reductions.

The impending fiscal storm will almost certainly separate those who have taken action to confront the difficult, and at times painful, realities of budgetary pressures from those who, either through denial or hubris, believe they are immune from its reach. As tough as it is to take action in advance of massive operational and personnel cost-cutting measures, few organizational realities compare with the sheer agony and consequence of an unprepared entity accepting the broadsword of efficiencies levied against it.

Therefore, it is incumbent on agency leaders to not only move swiftly to identify and address any current deficiencies in the organization, but to implement the best possible proactive measures in anticipation of the unforeseen.

Developing a Playbook for Successful Change

To assist government leaders in better understanding the characteristics of successful transformations, the IBM Center recently asked Bob Reisner, an expert in government transformation, to interview a select group of federal executives who have recently undertaken major transformation initiatives in their organizations. The results, featured in this issue of *The Business of Government* magazine, frame a series of interrelated steps which government executives should consider when they undertake any transformation initiative:

- Develop a compelling transformation game plan
- Align the transformation game plan with your mission
- Center your game plan with a reliable innovation process
- Transform strategically
- Design implementation to sustain transformation

Transformational change is not the steady, incremental improvement most government officials have spearheaded in the past. Success in transformation depends on getting the right changes done right. A key lesson from leaders profiled here is that transformation is indeed hard work, requiring intensive engagement with all stakeholders, including employees. Transformation is clearly not for the faint-hearted, and in the modern networked age, it is likely to be far more consuming than any strategic challenge that has come before.

It is time for new ideas, re-thinking of old models, and the enthusiasm of new leadership to tackle old problems with fresh ideas and energy. ■