

December 2005

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Recommended Citation

Carr, Judith and McDaniel, Elizabeth, "Cross-Boundary Leadership: A New Challenge for eGovernment" (2005). *BLED 2005 Proceedings*. 17.

<http://aisel.aisnet.org/bled2005/17>

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18th Bled eConference

eIntegration in Action

Bled, Slovenia, June 6 - 8, 2005

Cross-Boundary Leadership: A New Challenge for eGovernment

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Abstract

To achieve the vision of eGovernment, organizations across the U.S. federal, state, and local government are challenged to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and to afford citizens the same access to information and services they have come to expect from eCommerce. eGovernment also has the potential to foster participation in governance. To achieve eGovernment objectives, leaders must collaborate across boundaries with their counterparts in other departments, organizations, and levels of government. In 2002, the Information Resources Management College (IRMC), National Defense University (NDU) began focusing on the development of cross-boundary leadership as the foundation of its new eGovernment Leadership Certificate.

1. Introduction

Government is in the throes of revolutionary change. Spawned by the great possibilities of the Internet and the fact that we are living in an increasingly interconnected society, the public sector is radically changing the way it orchestrates the “business of government.” Three key forces are driving this monumental change. Citizens, enamored with the anywhere-anytime service delivery models of eCommerce leaders such as eBay and Amazon.com, are demanding the same ease of access to government services. World events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States have driven home the need for government to share information in real time and this requires multiple levels of connectivity. Lastly, legislation crossing the spectrum of government has been enacted holding agencies accountable for streamlining operations, optimizing efficiencies and implementing eGovernment service delivery models. Stepping up the pressure, U.S. President George W. Bush identified electronic government as one of the key elements in his first-term *President’s Management Agenda*.

A wide range of eGovernment initiatives in the United States have been implemented in response to citizen demand for an “intelligently integrated” approach to service delivery, also called services without boundaries (Ready, 2004). Agencies have been called upon to blend the lines between agencies at a time when the internal focus is on streamlining, cost-savings and/or cost-mitigation. The challenge for government is to implement eSolutions across the three elements of eGovernment: government to government, government to business, and government to citizens. To carry forth these eGovernment initiatives, leaders must turn their focus outward to the customer or citizen, while also maintaining a focus on their organizations. Success in the eGovernment arena requires agencies and agency executives to create a new paradigm of leadership and to work together across traditional boundaries to improve services significantly and to reduce operating costs. Effective eGovernment requires a new breed of leadership -- executives with competencies based in collaboration, communication, and enterprise thinking.

The old command-and-control leadership, already under fire by the new generation of workers, suffers greatly in this new environment. Effective leaders of eGovernment initiatives must be enthusiastic and savvy communicators who engage participants through collaboration and partnerships. Together they build new bridges to realign resources, incentives, rewards, and policies to support cross-boundary initiatives. Stewart (2002) captures the essence of cross-boundary leadership:

The collaborative leader brings people together helping them to lay aside differences of power, boundaries, revenues and special interest. They are a convener summoning diverse groups. They operate openly, share power and enjoy the respect of others and are more workhorse than show horse. They give credit to others; are not afraid of diversity and ideas and opinions and do not let them get in the way of the greater group and public interest.

This paper begins with a description of the networked nature of government and builds a case for a new kind of leadership that must emerge to meet the expectations and challenges of eGovernment. The competencies for the new paradigm of leadership form the foundation for a new graduate-level curriculum designed to develop cross-boundary leaders fully capable of stepping up to the challenges of eGovernment in the United States.

2. The Evolving Networked Nature of Government

Organizational hierarchies or bureaucracies were once the familiar representation of government, built to organize decision making and communication through their multiple layers and departmental structures. These bureaucracies, characterized by centralized authority, controlled information, and differentiated talents and functions, led to complexity and the development of specialized units derisively called silos (Toregas, 2002). The effectiveness of hierarchies in today’s environment is being challenged by multi-dimensional issues, the overload of information available via the Internet, and the proliferation of human networks of communication and action.

Communication technologies fostering informal communities are fundamentally changing the way businesses, universities, government agencies, and other organizations operate because they bypass the laws of bureaucracy and allow individuals and organizations to connect across boundaries. For the first time, information can be shared in an open environment, one that does not acknowledge hierarchy or rank. Networks provide a vehicle for quick response and are flexible and adaptable, providing the capability for rapid deployment and just-in-time decision making. In short, networks provide the

technical capability that enables leaders to rise above silo-thinking and address issues at the more global or enterprise level (Grantham and Carr, 2002).

Information sharing is a key element of and a powerful stimulus to building community (Osborne, 2000). Networked communities composed of relatively enduring affiliations of interacting entities are formed on the basis of shared interests, services, missions, customers, suppliers, or other compelling mutual concerns. By their very nature these communities are less directive and more facilitative in providing support, guidance, incentives, and performance evaluation than hierarchies. Members of networks are not inhibited by structure or bureaucracy and tend to upset traditional models of authority as they collaborate across the net. Communities provide a non-traditional option for problem solving, innovating, and driving change. As information becomes more ubiquitous and networks more interoperable, knowledge workers in flatter organizations are empowered to make decisions. The balance of power has shifted and a new breed of leaders, skilled as relationship managers and collaborators, will be required to replace the bureaucrats of today (Grantham and Carr, 2002).

The increasingly networked nature of government is driven by the need to address the complexity of cross-boundary issues, the diffusion of authority, the rapid advances in technology, and public unwillingness to accept and fund poor performance (Linden, 2002). Today's government leaders must be comfortable functioning as members of informal and nurturing networks, where leadership is shared and collective objectives outweigh and sometimes contradict individual organizational requirements. Networked government has created the need for new skills in cross-boundary communication and leadership (Toregas, 2002).

Cross-boundary leaders often face budgetary, financial, legislative, and cultural inhibitors to achieving their goals. At the United States federal government level they are establishing cross-agency portals (e.g., Firstgov.gov) and government to government portals (e.g., www.govbenefits.gov, www.usajobs.gov) that focus on the customer. To be successful they must build coalitions, scope the change effort, analyze the obstacles, be bold, understand limits and risks, clarify decision limits and authorities, place a credible manager in charge of each business process, know the people and culture across the borders, and dismantle the borders (Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team, 1995).

3. Expectations of eGovernment

Private and public sector organizations, educational and other not-for-profit institutions are using information technologies to achieve their missions and to drive more accessible service delivery models for customers, students, and citizens. By taking advantage of information technologies and applications, these organizations expect to reduce transaction costs, promote low-cost distribution of information, reduce barriers, and cross boundaries (Obinger and Katz, 2000). eCommerce transactions and communications among businesses and their suppliers and customers streamline processes and allow for more customized services and products. Citizens now expect government agencies to be as user-friendly, transparent, virtual, and as responsive as their commercial counterparts. Citizens now expect government offices and agencies to adopt eCommerce practices to achieve greater efficiencies and cost-savings in the government arena.

Over the past few years there has been a significant shift in the way the public perceives how government business is accomplished (Grantham and Carr, 2002). Our expectations and personal behavior have changed in regard to information, communication, and speed of access and transactions. eGovernment allows citizens to interface with all levels of government, anytime-anyplace. Citizens can surf the web, gather information via the Internet, and conduct important business with government organizations from the comfort

of their homes, offices, or internet cafes around the globe. In addition to streamlining government and providing citizen-centric service delivery models, eGovernment is contributing to national security goals and homeland defense through multi-directional collaboration across all levels of government, both domestic and foreign. eGovernment is an opportunity and a mandate being addressed by governments and citizens world-wide.

The concept of eGovernment is thought by some to be the application of eCommerce concepts by government organizations while others think of eGovernment simply as government, using technology to drive citizen interaction. The roots of eGovernment can be found in the early 1990's when then U.S. Vice President Al Gore challenged government executives to reinvent the federal government, making it smarter, faster, and more effective. This was the first time government thought of the citizen as its customer. This also led to a major transformation in the way government employees thought about and performed their jobs (Gore, 1993). In *From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government that Works Better and Costs Less*, Al Gore (1993) recommended partnerships that crossed internal and external boundaries to facilitate integrated service delivery models and collaborative policy development. Operating like a "boundary-less company," government should be a place where the primary loyalty of employees is to the citizen and cross-agency work is commonplace (Gore, 1993a). Subsequent legislation, such as the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and the eGovernment Act of 2002 have their roots in the Government Productivity and Results Act of 1992 and the early work of the Clinton Administration.

Although great strides have been made in the transformation of government, many challenges lie ahead. The most significant obstacle to change can be found in the culture of government. The complex bureaucracies of government were patterned after the hierarchical models that grew out of the Industrial Age, where the rules-based focus was on process. This slow and costly approach of government has perpetuated itself over the decades, and its "emphasis on process steals resources from the real job: serving the customer" (Gore, 1993a). The culture and reward systems of government have socialized employees to look inward and to focus on their organization's goals, no matter how small or unconnected to the larger mission of the agency or public they serve. The challenge is to change a culture that is rooted in a legacy of standard operating procedures to one that is agile and more responsive to the citizens that government seeks to serve.

It is critical for agencies to embrace an enterprise approach to orchestrating the business of government. According to Ready (2004), the major obstacle to government transformation is that organizations tend to view leadership from a unit rather than enterprise perspective. Enterprise or cross-boundary leadership is "an unnatural act." Citizen-centric government will require leaders to adopt a new enterprise psychology, one that embraces collaboration and cross-agency information sharing. By redefining the enterprise to encompass all citizens, the "public" to which any organization or agency is responsible is enlarged. In the United States, the federal government tasked the Office of Management and Budget with the mandate to simplify and unify "the silo" redundant systems. Although these systems meet the needs of the individual constituencies, they are not interoperable and do not facilitate the level of information sharing required to serve customers effectively and efficiently.

In an effort to achieve an enterprise model, a consolidated effort is underway to bring multiple "silo" systems under a federal enterprise-wide eGovernment umbrella. Systems for common functions including travel, rule making, and payroll are being consolidated, implementing the "best of breed" systems across many agencies. These efforts are instrumental in changing the culture of government and implementing new processes that focus on best practices and sharing.

For today's homeland security and law enforcement needs, federal agencies, state and local jurisdictions are creating compatible systems that make it possible to share data, so we can avoid the information gaps faced by the first responders on September 11th.

The challenges of reinventing government and implementing eGovernment reveal the complexity of conducting government across agencies, levels, and sectors. We face "wicked problems" as opposed to "tame problems" (Conklin, 2003) because of the size, complexity, and social issues of government. Wicked problems have no clear-cut solution, no fixed borders, and no experts who possess all the required knowledge. They demand collective intelligence, or more precisely, tools and methods to create shared understanding and shared commitment (Rittel and Webber, 1973). They require the collective wisdom of people with different perspectives and expertise across organizations and networks. Together the individual government entities can create enterprise solutions, sharing knowledge and perspectives and having conversations that cross many boundaries (Addelson, 2003).

4. eGovernment Calls for a New Kind of Leadership

eGovernment requires a new paradigm of leadership. Sometimes called transformational leadership, the kind of leadership that is called for is characterized by inspirational motivation or the ability to mobilize and create community and commitment around common goals (Hartley and Allison, 2000). Community or cross-boundary leadership is focused on the whole, viewing the requirements of the individual organization as a component of the greater whole or the enterprise. Cross-boundary leadership requires that executives focus on satisfying citizen-customers, building multi-organizational capabilities, and aligning skills and behaviors to mission and processes (Ready, 2004). This new paradigm requires a new set of core values with an emphasis on building strategic competence. The challenge is to change the culture and the supporting systems of reward to foster enterprise- rather than silo-thinking. Historically, executives have built careers on their ability to lead autonomous units successfully. eGovernment requires that leaders "build alliances, links and networks with and between several organizations to achieve synergies, integration and joint outcomes" (Hartley and Allison, 2000). Successful leaders have well developed "vertical muscles" but leaders who assume responsibility for cross-boundary change initiatives need to exercise "horizontal muscles" (Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team, 1995).

Chief Information Officers, who ranked "making the business and cultural changes necessary for full eGovernment transformation" as second of their top ten concerns (Association for Federal Information Resources Management, 2002), and others who undertake leadership projects, are currently evaluated and rewarded for their performance related to the achievement of their IT organization's mission and goals. eGovernment initiatives compel executives to work across boundaries with their counterparts in other departments, organizations, agencies, and governments. Although the benefits of collaborative systems and data sharing seem obvious, leaders still face obstacles stemming from current culture, policies, reward systems, funding sources, regulations and laws (in some cases). One of the biggest challenges ahead will be to evaluate performance in terms of enterprise rather than organizational behavior.

Collaboration is a critical competency for an eGovernment leader. Actualizing shared goals requires collaboration in terms of sharing time, personnel, resources, and even credit with co-collaborators. According to the U.S. General Services Administration report *Government Without Boundaries* (2002), collaboration must be organized and efficient. It should permit different levels of participation, equally consider the priorities and issues across jurisdictions, respect different levels of technical maturity, and appreciate jurisdictional independence and identity. Collaborative ventures tend to be more

attractive to smaller organizations lacking the funding and perhaps the intellectual capital to drive customized solutions for partners already heavily invested in an organization-specific solution. As stated in *Government Without Boundaries* (2002), cross-boundary initiatives may create new risks, cause new complexity, and may result in reduced control for particular participants. Individual organizational needs, priorities, and legal frameworks are balanced against the needs of the collective vision to create an integrated solution that offers the promise of better overall service, long-lasting results, and lower costs.

This first generation of eGovernment leaders can be considered pioneers, breaking new ground and assuming personal risks by implementing cross-boundary initiatives. They are creating a reservoir of experiences of the best and worst practices for future generations of eGovernment leaders. They march to the drum beat of two masters because they must be true to their individual organization's mission, goals and objectives while contributing to the new cross-boundary enterprise. This often requires well developed relationship skills in both camps. The pioneers must be able to clearly articulate the value add of enterprise initiatives to their senior management. Subsequent generations of eGovernment leaders must continue in the footsteps of their predecessors. This will require a new generation of public servants who are skilled at communicating, coordinating, and collaborating as members of networks across sectors, levels, departments, and agencies. As participants in networks they must learn to foster trust among members, be selfless risk-takers, and effectively focus on intended outcomes of the new citizen-centric environment.

The new leaders must think systemically, influence others without relying on organizational authority, and share responsibility and accountability with other cross-boundary participants. To be effective cross-boundary leaders must appreciate cultural and organizational differences, and appreciate, create, and take advantage of networks that rely on technology, management, policy, and people. In non-hierarchical organizations or networks leadership of individuals and organizations relies on collaboration, continual learning, diverse perspectives, profound change, and systems cognition (Bonous-Hammarth, 2001).

5. Educating Emerging eGovernment Leaders

The authors and their colleagues at the Information Resources Management College of National Defense University, an accredited university funded by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), identified the importance of cross-boundary leadership for eGovernment leadership and have made it a fundamental competency in the certificate programs developed for next generation government leaders. The College offers graduate-level educational programs to middle to senior level employees across DOD and federal, state and local government. Many of its students, both military officers and civilian managers, are preparing for advanced levels of management and leadership. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) Certificate Program, the largest certificate program, seeks to develop students' critical thinking, knowledge, and skills related to information and information technology policy, planning, and performance. Leadership is a goal of the program because CIOs are strategic leaders in their organizations, responsible for facilitating change, and aligning essential information technology personnel and resources to achieve the organizational mission.

The design of a new program in eGovernment leadership was a logical next step. In 2000, the college began offering eBusiness and eChannels courses as part of the CIO Certificate Program. The faculty developed a course in eGovernment policy in response to the changing environment of government. In 2002, key faculty collaborated to describe the effective leader in current and future eGovernment and eMilitary roles and

organizations as one who demonstrates the knowledge and skills to set new directions, transforms processes and resource uses, and uses information strategically. The faculty further articulated thirteen competencies that describe what highly effective eGovernment leaders know and know how to do.

eGOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES		
SETTING NEW DIRECTIONS		
Policy	Understanding the environment, principles, policies, and foundations of eGovernment	“eGovernment”
Thinking	Applying systems thinking to complex eGovernment challenges	
Planning	Planning and organizing strategically for eGovernment	“Information Management Planning” or “eServices Planning for Improved Government Performance”
Change	Transforming organizations and cultures to sustain eGovernment	“Transforming to eGovernment”
TRANSFORMING PROCESSES & RESOURCE USE		
Collaboration	Collaborating across boundaries to achieve eGovernment goals	
Architecture and Enterprise Integration	Understanding and applying effective architecture and systems for eGovernment	“Enterprise Architecture for Managers” or “Enterprise Resource Planning”
Human Capital	Using new models to extend human capital for eGovernment	“Strategic Human Capital Management Issues”
Financial Resources and Investment Management	Planning and managing funds and resources strategically for eGovernment	“Information Technology Capital Planning”
Performance Management	Managing performance-based eGovernment programs and projects	“Measuring Results of Organizational Performance” or “Strategic Management of Websites”
Execution/Implementation	Moving from concept to reality	
USING INFORMATION STRATEGICALLY		
Information and Knowledge Resources	Providing the right information and knowledge at the right time within and across boundaries	“Data Management System” or “Homeland Security” or “Knowledge Management”
Security and Privacy	Balancing security, privacy, access issues, and protection of information for eGovernment	“Security, Privacy, and Access Issues in eGovernment”
Technologies	Understanding strategic uses of information through the use of technologies	

Table 1: The eGovernment Leadership Certificate Program

To validate the eGovernment competencies the college invited fifty thought leaders in government to review the draft eGovernment leadership competencies and to provide feedback. Twenty-five thought leaders attended meetings to discuss the intellectual underpinnings of an academic program to be built on these competencies. Using the

ideas, critical issues, and controversies they identified, the faculty developed a curriculum for emerging eGovernment leaders. The revised competencies became the framework for a curriculum containing courses offered in the CIO Certificate Program as well as new ones for the new program. Figure 1 aligns the thirteen competencies with the associated courses or course options in the eGovernment Leadership Certificate program; some courses are required and some may be selected from among alternatives. Cross-boundary leadership, systems thinking, collaboration, and relevant information technologies are integrated across courses along with global perspectives and best practices.

6. Integrating Cross-Boundary Leadership into the Curriculum

Cross-boundary leadership is an explicit learning outcome of the eGovernment Leadership Certificate Program. The faculty has integrated the concepts of cross-boundary leadership into their courses by specifying leadership development objectives, instruction, activities, opportunities, and assessments related to the content of the courses. To accomplish this, the professors, who are multi-disciplinary in their academic and professional perspectives, engage in discussions, workshops, and scholarly activities related to cross-boundary leadership, collaboration, and systems thinking. As they embrace the concepts of cross-boundary leadership, they are reframing and enriching their courses to include these foundational skills and competencies, as well as relevant global eGovernment perspectives and best practices. The appropriate technologies related to eGovernment are being integrated across courses as well. The curriculum is constantly under review to ensure that the program is achieving its objectives.

The eGovernment Leadership Certificate is built on several assumptions. One is that leadership can be taught. A second is that the kind of leadership needed to achieve the goals of eGovernment is different from the kind of leadership that is focused primarily on achieving the goals of the leader's organization. A third assumption is that the program can change the leadership behavior of its graduates. Effective eGovernment leadership is all about behaving in new ways, ways that acknowledge organizational contributions and celebrate and reward inter-organizational achievements. eGovernment leaders, through their actions, must motivate superior individual performance and build high performing organizations and networks – not for personal or organizational credit – but to achieve broader societal goals – goals that can only be realized by cross-boundary communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

Every course cohort is viewed as a learning community of adult learners. The students represent various organizations and bring rich perspectives that contribute to the intellectual capital of the course. Faculty takes advantage of the heterogeneity of the members of the class by building expertise vicariously and cross-boundary solutions through assignments and class activities. Using a seminar approach, the faculty facilitates active learning using case studies, team projects, joint papers and presentations that challenge students to understand multiple points of view and to collaborate on problems and solutions during class. Faculty provides immediate guidance on the processes and feedback on opportunities to practice new learning and leadership tasks.

7. Conclusion

The challenges of leadership in this networked age offer great promise and great challenges. Successful leaders must manage across networks and leverage partnerships and resources across organizational boundaries. The academic program described in this paper, the first of its kind, focuses on the development of cross-boundary leadership to advance an eGovernment agenda. The concepts that underlie cross-boundary leadership will be enriched through on-going validation and research with cross-boundary leaders,

and the findings will inform the educational program described in this paper. The impact of the program in developing cross-boundary leadership will be continually assessed by engaging the graduates in dialogue about their efforts to advance an E-government agenda.

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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