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Navigating Crisis: Insightful Lessons in Resilience

Events over the last couple of years have put a renewed emphasis on the importance of being resilient. Leaders and organizations have been walloped by the unforgiving realities of disruption and uncertainty. Often when responding to the unforeseen—doing all one can to operate, meeting expectations, following through on commitments, and delivering on missions—there is little time to reflect, take stock, or gain perspective. When faced with the unexpected, reflex and instinct seem to be what leaders and organizations alike rely on to weather the turbulence. Though these may serve as core components of a solid foundation, they are most certainly not enough.

This edition of *The Business of Government* magazine underscores the importance of resilience—how correlating short-term decision-making with long-range consequences can help you become ready for future shocks. We highlight the latest trends and best practices for improving government effectiveness by introducing you to key government executives, detailing the work of public management practitioners, and offering insights from leading academics on how best to navigate an increasingly complex environment and build a more resilient future.

Discovering Value in the Unexpected

Evidence and observation tell us it isn't simply about getting by. Resilience is more about pushing through and bouncing forward after adversity or disappointment—turning crisis into opportunity and recognizing the wisdom offered by Oscar Wilde in his play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, “what seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.” Indeed, honing our capacity to be resilient can help unveil the truth of Wilde's penetrating insight and discover value in the unexpected.

At the onset of the pandemic, I began a series on [Leading Through Uncertain Times](#), which explores the qualities, tools, tactics, and mindset that leaders from all sectors may need to navigate unsettling times and transform order out of chaos. Like the topic of leadership, much has been written about resilience.

I recently came across, *Resilient Leadership: Beyond Myths and Misunderstanding*, released in 2017 well before our current tumult. The author, Karsten Drath, views resilience as a dynamic competency not hardwired in us from birth, but developed, cultivated, and strengthened through effort and experience. He puts forth some practical steps and strategies to do just that. He offers some cogent insights on what it means to be a resilient leader, but he also dedicates a portion of his work based on cited research to dispel myths and misunderstandings surrounding resilience.

Reflecting on Drath's fuller deconstructing of these myths, it reminded me of a 2002 Harvard Business Review article, *How Resilience Works*, by Diane Coutu. This piece still has much to teach us. If as [Gartner declares organizational resilience is a strategic imperative](#), then Coutu's article should be required reading for all leaders.

In it she describes three core characteristics that resilient people—and organizations—exhibit. They possess a “staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise.” One can bounce back from hardship with just one or two of these qualities, but one will only be truly resilient with all three.

Reading Now for the Next Shock

As the pandemic recedes, there may be a tendency among people and institutions to bounce forward thinking in terms of the last disruption. Leaders must not fall prey to this tyranny of the present. The next shock to the system is less likely to be a global pandemic. Regardless of what is on the horizon, a single constant remains: uncertainty abounds.

The most effective way to navigate the unknown and discover value in the unexpected rests on the importance of being resilient. So, anticipating the future—getting ahead of events rather than being subsumed by them—becomes integral to positioning, resourcing, and preparing an agency for what may come, while always keeping focus on primary responsibilities.

Here are summaries of what you will find in this edition of *The Business of Government* magazine.

Conversations with Leaders

Throughout the year, I have the pleasure of speaking with key government executives and public sector leaders about their agencies, accomplishments, and visions of government in the twenty-first century. The leaders profiled exemplify a commitment to visionary thinking—manifesting the leadership and strategic foresight to meet their varied missions.

- **Michael Brown, Director, Defense Innovation Unit (DIU)** directs the only U.S. Department of Defense organization focused exclusively on fielding and scaling commercial technology across the U.S. military to help it solve critical problems and build a future-ready force. “DIU is building the technology pipeline,” explains Michael Brown, director of the DIU. “We work to ensure our global leadership, alongside our allies and partners, by forging new partnerships and growing the innovation ecosystem. A thriving public-private ecosystem is essential to maintaining American competitiveness.” Brown joined me on *The Business of Government Hour* to discuss DIU’s critically important mission, his “fast-follower” strategy, and how DIU uses alternative acquisition approaches to bring commercial technology into the U.S. Department of Defense.
- **Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General, U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)** leads the U.S. Government Accountability Office, working with Congress to improve the performance of government, ensure transparency, and save federal funds. Today, the agency’s work spans all federal programs and spending. “GAO performs a range of oversight, insight, and foresight-related work,” explains Gene Dodaro, “to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.” Comptroller General Dodaro joined me on *The Business of Government Hour* to discuss the evolving mission of GAO, how it is innovating the way it conducts its oversight mission, and what the future holds for the agency.
- **Admiral Karl Schultz, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard** leads one of the oldest continuously operating naval service of the United States with the motto *Semper Paratus* (‘Always Ready’), which is more than a motto; it goes to the core of its mission. Today’s complex maritime operating environment demands nothing less. “As the twenty-sixth commandant of the Coast Guard,” explains Admiral Schultz, “my guiding



principles focus on ensuring our Service remains best positioned to 'Stand the Watch.' Our Coast Guard is strong, the total workforce highly capable, and the demand for our services never greater." Admiral Schultz joined me on *The Business of Government Hour* to discuss the Coast Guard's strategic direction, his key priorities and modernization efforts, and reflections on his tenure as the commandant.

Insights from Leaders

All year long, I speak regularly with leaders who are pushing limits, transforming the way the government works, and making a difference. This edition introduces eight government executives who share their insights on the work they do and the efforts they lead. Their respective missions force them to look ahead, and although they come from diverse disciplines, they are all focusing on finding what works. They joined me on *The Business of Government Hour* to discuss the missions they lead and critical issues they face.



- **Sanjeev “Sonny” Bhagowalia, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Information and Technology, and Chief Information Officer, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)** shares his insights on CBP’s mission, its strategy for IT modernization, and how the agency is using technology to change the way it does business. “My office,” says Sonny Bhagowalia, “has been increasingly called on to meet the challenges of an ever-changing environment.” He recognizes that to be successful his agency requires a resilient, adaptive, reliable, and secure IT infrastructure that keeps pace with evolving threats and technological advances.
- **Jane Datta, Chief Human Capital Officer, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** recognizes that integral to the success of NASA’s mission are the people and workforce of the agency. “Our vision is people first, mission always,” she declares. Mission success relies upon strong workforce planning, acquiring top talent quickly, enhancing how people work, and creating a workplace environment that cultivates and fosters innovation and engagement. Jane offers insights into how the operations of her office support the mission of NASA. She also discusses current challenges, the response to the pandemic, and the changing nature of how and where work is done.
- **Sanjay Gupta, Former Chief Technology Officer, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)** understands that technology is a force multiplier and key to mission success. “SBA may be one of the smaller cabinet level agencies,” admits Sanjay Gupta, “but it has played a very significant role in the nation’s largest economic recovery response in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic.” For Gupta, technology has been a critical enabler in making this happen. He shares his insight into SBA’s cloud journey and digital technology strategy. Since our discussion, Sanjay has taken on a new leadership role with an office within the U.S. Department of Justice. We wish him the best in his new role.
- **Jamie Holcombe, Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)** came to the agency to modernize and transform how it uses technology to accomplish its constitutionally required mission. “I came to help the agency,” explains Holcombe, “to stabilize and modernize its IT systems and infrastructure, to move it from a client-server-based system to an internet and cloud-driven one.” He outlines USPTO’s IT strategy, his efforts to realize this vision, the challenges met, and innovations accomplished at an agency integral to the success of nation’s economy.



- **Pamela Isom, Director, Artificial Intelligence and Technology Office, U.S. Department of Energy** emphasizes the critical importance of pursuing an ethical and trustworthy application of artificial intelligence. “It is the mission of this office,” explains Isom, “to transform the department into a world-leading AI enterprise by accelerating research, development, delivery, demonstration, and adoption of responsible and trustworthy AI. She provides her insights into the mission and purpose of the office she leads, discusses the importance of responsible and trustworthy AI, and highlights her key priorities.
- **Kate Kelley, Chief Human Capital Officer, Army Futures Command (AFC)** understands that the workforce is the foundation of AFC’s success. It focuses specifically on forging future readiness. Its stated mission is to make sure soldiers have what they need, before they need it, to protect tomorrow today. “AFC is charged with doing what some may consider impossible, and that is predicting the future,” explains Kelley. She outlines the AFC human capital strategy, its efforts to attract, reskill, and retain the right talent, and ways it is working to transform organizational culture.
- **Caroline Kuharske, Acting Chief Data Officer, Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA)** is charged with building a holistic approach to the management of data, merging silos, and deriving value from those data assets that are the lifeblood of her agency. DISA is considered the nation’s premiere IT combat support agency. “We have supported and enhanced,” explains Kuharske, “the overall communication infrastructure at a global scale to support the warfighters. She describes the mission of her office, the agency’s evolving data strategy, and details insights into how DISA is leveraging data as a strategic asset.
- **Stacy Marcott, senior official performing the duties of the Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** underscores that DHS must be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. To do that, the department continues to modernize its financial management systems. “Our financial management strategy has four core goals,” describes Marcott, “to be a workplace of choice, revolutionize business practices and systems, allocate resources based on mission requirements and priorities, and provide evidence that we are good stewards of taxpayer money.” She shares her insights into the DHS’ financial management strategy and its financial systems modernization journey.

Perspective on Leading through Uncertain Times



My goal each week on *The Business of Government Hour* is straightforward: to interview key government executives and thought leaders who are tackling significant challenges and seizing opportunities to lead. To complement these examples of leadership in action, the show also highlights the practical, actionable research done by some of the most recognized and respected thought leaders. It is from this rich library that I draw on the insights from five authors I have had the pleasure of interviewing over the last several years. These authors—Bob Rosen, Jacqueline Carter, Chester Elton, Michael Canic, and Margaret Heffernan—have helped me recognize and understand that leaders benefit from being grounded, mindful, grateful, and ultimately, ruthlessly consistent in everything they do. This perspective ends with a focus on leadership as a creative act.



Viewpoints

Dan Chenok reveals there is little to no value in a sole actor response to twenty-first century challenges. Only through leveraging a mosaic of interests can most modern complexities be addressed by governments, often working with their partners in civil society, academia, and industry. A blockbuster, one-time-only pandemic driven grant of \$350 billion to states and localities has created an opportunity of a lifetime to make investments in longstanding needs. John Kamensky ponders if officials will be up to the challenge. Margie Graves explores certain recommendations as to the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of zero trust. Mark Newsome details how the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs seeks to adopt newer technologies on its journey to become a lean, efficient supply chain that is recognized by its peers as being among the best in health care. Matt Warshaw muses on delivering what matters while improving government service delivery.

Management

This edition highlights two recent IBM Center reports that offer practical, actionable insights, recommendations, and principles that can help government executives manage successfully through the next crisis and improve supply chain operations leveraging analytics, blockchain, and AI.

The first report, [Managing The Next Crisis: Twelve Principles For Dealing With Viral Uncertainty](#), addresses the goal of helping governments capture lessons learned for future action, relying not just on lessons from the pandemic but also from other tragic events of the near or intermediate past. This report puts forward twelve principles that can help tackle and soften the impact of the next shock to the system, whatever that might be.

The second report, [The Key to Modern Governmental Supply Chain Practice: Analytical Technology Innovation](#), aims to provide insight on how technology innovation can facilitate supply chain management practice within government organizations. Technology innovation is examined through the lens of emerging technologies via analytics, blockchain, and AI.

I close this edition with brief descriptions of recent IBM Center reports. If you have not read these reports, please download them at businessofgovernment.org.

I hope you enjoy this edition of The Business of Government magazine. Please let us know what you think by contacting me at michael.j.keegan@us.ibm.com. 

