2004 Presidential Transition Series

Performance Management for Political Executives:

A "Start Where You Are, Use What You Have" Guide

Chris Wye

IBM Center for
**The Business
of Government**

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On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report by Chris Wye, "Performance Management for Political Executives: A 'Start Where You Are, Use What You Have' Guide." This is the second in our 2004 Presidential Transition Series aimed at assisting new political appointees in the next administration.

This report for political executives continues the Center's long-standing interest in performance management and the challenge of managing for results. The new report serves as a companion to Wye's previous report for career executives, "Performance Management for Career Executives: A 'Start Where You Are, Use What You Have' Guide." Because of the continued interest in that report, the Center has published a new edition. Together, the two reports add substantially to our understanding of how political appointees and career executives can overcome challenges in the design, alignment, use, and communication of performance measures and information.

Wye sees public service as a higher calling—to make things better for all citizens. Viewed from this perspective, performance *is* public service. Wye directly confronts the view of some political appointees that "management" is only a "C" or "D" issue in terms of their attention and priority. Instead, Wye strongly urges political officials to make performance management a high priority, in addition to their ongoing policy priorities. He believes that political officials should avoid the temptation to treat performance goals and measurement as simply another series of legal requirements. Instead, he argues that political executives should use performance goals and measurement as powerful tools to communicate, motivate, and align their organization to important public purposes.

We trust that this report will provide valuable insights to political executives as they come to Washington to make a difference in the lives of the American people they serve.

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Author's Note

In this volume, as in its predecessor—"Performance Management for Career Executives: A 'Start Where You Are, Use What You Have' Guide," strong emphasis is placed on the relationship between performance and public service.

From this perspective, performance is public service.

For both career and political civil servants, a primary motivation for public service is performance: the desire to make things better for all citizens.

In recent years, a number of pieces of legislation—such as the Government Performance and Results Act, which requires agencies to have strategic plans, annual plans, and annual reports focused on performance measures—have been put in place to help focus management's attention on performance.

In the same period, both political parties have sponsored performance-based management initiatives. President Clinton established the National Performance Review; President George W. Bush, the President's Management Agenda. Doubtless, others will follow.

But these initiatives have not always been implemented as effectively as they might be, and the goal of improved performance gets bogged down in and obscured by counterweights.

In the case of career civil servants, cynicism, discouragement, and weariness can be the cause. In the case of political appointees, sole focus on the political agenda can take undue precedence over fundamental management responsibilities.

Political appointees are first American citizens, second public servants, and third members of a political party.

It would seem that performance—the best performance—would be the natural goal of both political parties. And if the proof were to be found in rhetoric, the country would be awash in "good performance."

But the truth is that for many political appointees, good performance (in the sense of good management) is less a goal in itself but something that is pursued to avoid potential political problems.

Some seem to feel that career public servants have the primary responsibility for management, while political leaders bear primary responsibility for policy and politics. There is some truth to this. Career public servants are professional managers. Many have long tenure and substantial experience in their fields.

But the most important management decisions are made by political leaders. What new management systems should be developed? How much money should be assigned to what activities?

Management at its best and highest is leadership: setting priorities, allocating resources, tracking and achieving results, being accountable.

Performance-based management is nothing more than setting goals and tracking results.

It's allocating money and seeing what it buys—or delivers to American citizens.

It's their money.

Not ours. Not this or that administration's.

Most political appointees, like most career civil servants, want to do a good job. They are proud to be serving their country. They want to leave a good record. They want to make things better.

They just don't spend enough time on performance goals and measures.

Chris Wye

Introduction

Listening at the Front Lines

I was sitting at a table listening to a focus group identify the top challenges facing those charged with implementing the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). A professional facilitator was guiding the discussion; an assistant was recording the comments on a flip chart.

The group was not very engaged, and the comments were fairly ordinary. Some sounded like complaints: "We don't have the staff." "No one uses this stuff." "Our managers are not engaged."

Then someone said, "You know, our leader— the secretary—isn't interested in GPRA." Someone else said, "Same here." Another: "So, what's new?" And the dialogue took off: "You know, if anyone really wants this stuff to work, top leaders, especially the top political leaders, need to get engaged."

"And mean it," someone added.

A decade after the enactment of the Government Performance and Results Act, it is still clear—as it has been through the entire period regardless of the party in power—that political leaders have not really taken the act as seriously as they should.

It seems strange.

The law requires agencies to have a strategic plan, to establish performance goals and measures, and to report performance on an annual basis.

Isn't that what citizens should expect from the government that manages their tax dollars? And, as the top leaders in this government, directly accountable to the voting public, are not political appointees the ones most directly accountable for performance?

Everyone—not "almost everyone" or "practically everyone" but literally everyone—who has assessed progress under GPRA has come to the conclusion that top leaders, by and

large, do not take it as seriously as they should, and because they don't the program managers who report to them don't take it as seriously as they should.

The most recent review of progress under GPRA, the General Accounting Office's "Results-Oriented Government" (March 2004) concluded: "As we have noted before, top leadership commitment and sustained attention to achieving results … is essential to GPRA implementation. While one might expect an increase in agency leadership commitment since GPRA was implemented … federal managers reported that such commitment has not significantly increased."

Despite protestations to the contrary and specific initiatives—such as the President's Management Agenda and the emergence of the Program Assessment Rating Tool—everyone (career civil servants, political appointees, interest groups, oversight functions, knowledgeable citizens, and program beneficiaries) believes that top leaders are not doing what they should (and could) to lead the implementation of performance-based management.

Do top executives have a more fundamental responsibility than the performance of their agency, program, or activity? Is this responsibility more or less because the executive is a public servant? Is this responsibility more or less because the executive is a political appointee?

The Issues on the Ground

The purpose of this report is to respond to some of the most frequently heard comments made by political appointees about GPRA and other related performance-based management issues on the ground.

The intent is to provide direct answers to questions, antidotes to discouragement, practical suggestions to solve problems, and, most of all, to highlight the obligation all political appointees have to render the best and highest service—performance—to their country and its citizens.

As the former director of the Center for Improving Government Performance at the National Academy of Public Administration, I had the opportunity to see and hear many of the leading experts and practitioners in performance-based management from this and many other countries.

And, as the former director of the Center's Performance Consortium—a membership organization made up of 30 federal agencies that fund an annual program of peer-to-peer exchange of practices—I had the opportunity to meet and get to know many of the people involved in the implementation of the Results Act.

Members of the consortium normally were not the managers of programs or political leaders. They were the civil servants charged with preparing and submitting required plans and reports. Their work brought them into contact with the political appointees responsible for performance management issues. Typically, these were deputy assistant secretaries, some were assistant secretaries, and a few were deputy or undersecretaries.

Why Should Political Leaders Care about Performance Management?

Political leaders are triply vested—as American citizens, appointed public servants, and members of an incumbent political party—with bottom-line responsibility for the performance of the policies, programs, and activities entrusted to their care. During their term in office, no other category of citizens carries a higher and more sovereign mission or holds a clearer and more complete responsibility for the performance of government.

The *only* way political leaders can reliably know whether the resources and activities entrusted to their care are being managed efficiently and effectively, having the desired impact, and providing the highest possible quality service—in short, improving government performance—is through *vigilant monitoring of information about performance*. In today's world, this responsibility is called *performance management*. Its central requirement is that there be sufficient, credible, useful, and timely information about the effects of government activities so as to assure full accountability, thus preserving the integrity of both the American democratic political process and the government through which its priorities are established and carried out.

Recent Presidential Management Initiatives

In recent years, presidents of both political parties have pursued a "reform" agenda aimed at improving the management of government.

1993–2001
President Bill Clinton:
The National Performance Review

The National Performance Review (NPR)—later called the National Partnership for Reinventing Government—was led by Vice President Al Gore. NPR conducted a six-month review of the federal government, which provided the basis for hundreds of recommendations for improving performance by cutting the size of the workforce, eliminating management layers, and adopting performance-based management, and for changing the culture of the government. Under the leadership of NPR, cabinet agencies empowered reinvention teams, reinvention laboratories, experimentation, and cultural change by proposing new approaches, collecting useful examples, and launching demonstration projects.

2001–2004
President George W. Bush:
The President's Management Agenda
The Program Assessment Rating Tool

The President's Management Agenda (PMA) is intended to encourage a performance-based approach to management by identifying key priorities and closely tracking their performance. The PMA focuses on five priorities: the strategic management of human capital, competitive sourcing, financial management, electronic government, and budget and performance integration. Each initiative is coordinated by a government-wide leader, and all initiatives are monitored through a scorecard that assigns a red, yellow, or green light to indicate unacceptable, minimally acceptable, and outstanding performance.

The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) is an effort to leverage greater attention to performance-based management by using the budget to establish an effective link between the quality of information available on the performance of an activity or program and the level of resources devoted to that activity or program. The PART is a fill-in-the-blank survey designed to answer questions about four broad topics: program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, and program results. Answers are scored, and a total score is given for each activity or program. The PART process is data centric: Success or failure, as evident in higher or lower overall scores, depends on the data (read "information on performance") available to answer each question.

It is the views of these political appointees as reflected in the comments of career civil servants who worked for them that are the focus of this report. The issues are framed as they were reported—in the vernacular: "GPRA Is Just Paperwork," "Performance Management Is a Fad," "The Private Sector Is Different," "Congress Is Not Interested."

The issues have been culled from meetings, reports, workshops, and conferences sponsored by the Performance Consortium, as well as from conversations with individual consortium members—all over a 10-year period. The responses also have been taken from this dialogue. The formulation of neither the issues nor the responses as presented here represents a consensus or official view. The author alone is solely responsible for both.

A Few Answers Resolve Many Questions

This report responds to a long list of issues, all of which are expressed in short phrases, as they would occur in daily conversation. Each issue is presented as a statement in bold at the top of the page. The text that follows presents contextual background and analysis, and concludes with several recommended responses.

The report is not meant to be read serially. If it is read from start to finish, it will be found to be repetitive. It is meant to be used as a reference to locate responses—or, more properly, to prompt dialogue and jump-start thought and discussion—in relation to particular issues. The recommended responses given are intended as illustrative. Others can easily be imagined.

Repetition is unavoidable. The concept of performance management is not complex; it is not rocket science. We may pose many questions and define many issues, but most can be addressed with a relatively small number of responses.

The central principles of performance-based management are the same for political appointees as for career civil servants. Both are *public servants*.

But there is one very important difference, and that difference is at the heart of what this report is all about: As the highest-level leaders, political appointees have the highest level of responsibility for performance.

So, while the core principles for performance management are the same for both career and political appointees, appointees—being the top leaders—have the highest level of responsibility.

The following is a list of core performance management principles that reflect this higher level of responsibility:

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for assuming responsibility as individual public servants for the high trust inherent in their calling.

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for searching continuously for the highest-quality public service at the lowest cost.

A Primer on Recent Management Reform Legislation

The last decade and a half has given rise to a spate of legislation aimed at improving the performance of government. Key pieces of legislation include the following:

1990: The Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act
Intended to strengthen financial accountability in the government, the CFO Act created chief financial officers in the largest federal agencies who are responsible for managing agency financial matters, required the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop a five-year financial plan and report for the government, and required agency CFOs to conform their financial plans to the government-wide plan.

1993: The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)
The centerpiece of recent performance legislation, GPRA requires agencies to set goals and measure performance toward them. Each agency must prepare a three-year strategic plan, an annual plan, and an annual report. OMB is required to prepare a government-wide plan. A unique feature of GPRA is its strong focus on outcome measures.

1994: The Government Management and Reform Act (GMRA)
Designed to strengthen the CFO Act, GMRA extended the act by requiring an audit of each agency's financial statement as well as of the government-wide financial statement.

1996: The Information Technology Management Reform Act (ITMRA)
Also known as the Clinger-Cohen Act, ITMRA created the position of chief information officer in the largest federal agencies. CIOs are required to implement a "sound and integrated information technology architecture." The act empowers OMB to issue directives to CIOs, effectively giving OMB a leadership and coordinating responsibility position.

1996: The Federal Financial Management Improvement Act (FFMIA)
Again tightening the screws on agency financial management, FFMIA requires that agency annual financial statements include a report showing where their financials are in compliance with federal financial requirements, accounting standards, and the U.S. Government Standard General Ledger.

1998: Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA)
Intended to encourage the use of electronic, Web-based applications, the GPEA requires agencies to offer an electronic option for information gathering or use, and also requires agencies to accept electronic signatures.

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for using creatively whatever information can be found to improve programs.

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for doing something (to improve performance) in the face of all obstacles, as opposed to doing nothing.

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for placing boundaries on discouragement and moving constantly toward the high and noble goal of public service.

- **Political appointees have the highest level of leadership responsibility** for remembering that the money supporting public endeavors is not theirs but the public's, and that they are the trustees.

Neither career nor noncareer civil servants can promise or deliver perfect performance-based management. Management, almost by definition, is the art of the possible. Resources are scarce. Time is short. People are busy. No appropriation was made to support the implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act or most of the related performance-based initiatives.

But between doing nothing and doing everything, *something can be done.*

And, even with limited resources, some will do more and better than others. A few will do exceptional things.

Doing nothing or doing something with weak intent is not acceptable.

American citizens deserve your best effort.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized into five major sections. These are presented in the order in which the issues would arise in everyday practice. The titles, sequence, and focus of each section exactly parallels the earlier report, so that the two can be used together to facilitate dialogue between career and political civil servants.

The first section, "Making the Case for Performance Management," considers some of the objections and less-than-enthusiastic attitudes sometimes expressed toward the Results Act and related performance-based management initiatives. The next four sections take up specific stages in the design, installation, use, and communication of performance management techniques: "Designing Performance Indicators," "Aligning Performance Processes," "Using Performance Information," and "Communicating Performance Information." Each section discusses a number of specific issues. The format is the same for each discussion. Each begins with a statement in bold at the top of the page, followed by a discussion of the issue and concludes with several recommended responses.

Making the Case for Performance Management

Ten years ago, few incoming political appointees knew much about "performance management."

Fewer still knew about the Government Performance and Results Act.

Today, many new appointees know something about performance-based management because they have either heard about it or had direct experience with it in the private sector.

They may learn about GPRA and related performance initiatives for the first time when they arrive in Washington, but their previous experience often prepares them to understand its basic concepts. They also understand that performance-based management techniques are being pursued in both the private and public sectors all over the world.

Sometime, too, they bring with them the view that the concepts of "public service" and "performance" are incongruous, that "the Washington bureaucracy" does not or cannot perform at the highest level.

Sometimes, too, they see the work that has been done to date under GPRA and other performance initiatives as less than perfect and as a confirmation that the bureaucracy just can't hack it.

Almost always they conclude their terms of service and leave Washington with a very different—and much more positive—view toward the civil service.

"The Private Sector Is Different"

It is different.

But *difference* is not the point being made. The point often being made is that it's *better* in the private sector.

How many times has this remark been made, or something like it? And how many times has the intended point been difference?

You would think that over a period of time, say four or five decades, this kind of remark would be so embarrassing to its originator—and would reveal so much lack of thought, knowledge, professionalism, and courtesy—that it would cease to be made, at least not for public consumption.

Indeed, if difference were really the issue, the case can be made in reverse.

Government, and especially the United States government, is different from the private sector. It presides over the largest, most complex, most successful economy in the world, and at the same time delivers an amazing array of social services to a wide range of citizens.

Benchmarked against other governments, it's among the best in many areas.

We sometimes forget that the U.S. government is the largest human organization on the planet, dwarfing firms like General Electric and Microsoft. Bigness brings management challenges unknown in the private sector. Just communicating a policy throughout organiza-

tions as large as the Departments of Health and Human Services or Defense can take a significant amount of time.

Large organizations do not move as quickly or efficiently as small organizations. Complex organizations are not as nimble as less complex ones. And, in particular, multi-purpose organizations often do not convert resources into services as efficiently as single-purpose organizations.

A profit-oriented bottom line is not simple. But it is simpler than a bottom line whose goal is social equity. Private industry serves some of the people (those who can afford its services). Government must serve all of the people.

The government is not perfect. There's plenty that needs to be done to make it better.

But difference is not the issue.

Recommended Responses

1. It would be useful for individuals who have spent their careers in the private sector to spend some time learning about the government before coming to Washington. Unfortunately, there is no truly effective mechanism in place to assist a new presidential administration as it takes over the reins of power. One of the great unwritten stories of American democracy is what happens—or does not happen—during a transition. Literally, the outgoing adminis-

tration takes everything that is not bolted to the floor, and the incoming administration has to start from scratch. But reading, listening, and learning would be a good start.

2. Political leaders should manifest the same level of courtesy, professionalism, and respect in their government positions as they do in their private sector jobs. Not only is this basic humanity, but it is basic management and basic leadership.

"We're Gonna Get *It* Done"

Less heard than felt, these words reflect an attitude.

When a new administration takes office, a new group of people appears in town, and some are easily identified by their behavior.

"Like I was telling the secretary …," remarks one new arrival confiding to another. "We've got some big-ticket items over here …," announces the new chief financial officer at an executive staff meeting, in a tone of voice that conveys disdain for past lack of progress and fervent conviction that it's going to get done *this time around!*

There's an attitude in the air.

It's pervasive. Not everywhere, but pervasive.

It seems so odd. Imagine a newly arrived political appointee who is assigned to coach the Chicago Bulls and is overheard by the team making one of these remarks.

Why would a newly arrived executive in any setting, whether the setting is familiar or not, do anything but try to win over new employees? To turn an old saw around: Would they do it this way in the private sector?

Well, of course, things are more complicated than this. Political appointees, like civil servants, are public servants—and there are an awful lot of good ones.

But the attitude remains and is renewed every time there is a change of administration. And if the attitude is hard to fathom, so is the logic.

The average appointee has a tenure of 18 to 24 months. This is a widely known fact. What could anyone expect to do in a time frame that short without the active help of subordinates?

Conceding that politics is politics, that running against Washington is an effective political strategy, and even that "reorganizing" or "downsizing" the government is a legitimate goal—why would an outnumbered, outpositioned, and outknowledged general antagonize the troops he has to lead into battle?

It's a strange tango.

Especially since many of these same political appointees will leave office with good words to say about their civil service staff, and many civil servants will reluctantly say goodbye to good political leaders.

Recommended Responses
1. Stories are reported and books are written about fabled private sector executives who take over an ailing business, make tough decisions, throw out the deadwood, and get things moving. There is always a need for tough decision making and tough management. But toughness is not the normative or exclusive criteria for effective management, especially when there are more of them than there are of you, and they all know more about the operation than you do. A hard, realistic assessment of the human dimensions of a political transition, and the development of an effective strategy for maximizing the ability to mobilize management resources, would be an enormous benefit.

2. A highly professional, respectful, and courteous manner costs nothing and gains much. It's the same in many walks of life; a little sugar goes a long way. An example of a rare and useful courtesy: Look at the résumés of the people working for you. Almost no one does. You may find some very well-educated and accomplished people, people you'd be proud to have working for you. At a minimum, you'll know who they are.

"We Don't *Need* the Best"

Or words to this effect, said one prominent official, implying that if we just had people who would show up on time and do what they are told, we'd be a lot better off.

This would have been an unfortunate remark for any executive, but it was especially unfortunate because the person making it in 1981 was the director of the Office of Personnel Management, the organization responsible for human resource policy government-wide.

Those who were around when this remark was made will know that these were not the exact words used. There's no need to pin the tail on the donkey, or in this case elephant. But the general attitude conveyed is more widespread, especially at the beginning of a new administration, than is publicly recognized.

The appropriateness (not to mention the effect on morale) of this kind of remark needs no elaboration.

But the question of whether it is true needs to be answered.

Do we or do we not need the best people in public service?

Here are some questions that may help to frame the answer. As a citizen, whom do you want to be responsible for:

• Protecting the country from enemies

• Assuring that water and food are safe

• Maintaining the environment

• Monitoring the quality of new medicines and drugs

• Regulating airline safety

Do you want the most competent people you can find, or people who will show up and do what they are told?

This is not to ignore the fact that some civil servants may be inefficient, ineffective, or discourteous; or that some may be less efficient, less effective, or less courteous than they should be.

But if the question is what kind of people do you want managing your government and delivering your services, most of us would want the best and brightest, or at least those who are very good.

Recommended Responses

1. Quality is always in order and in season, no matter what the sector. In fact, one could make the case that the highest standards should be in evidence in the public sector, since in our form of government we delegate to the public service activities to be carried out *on our behalf*—in other words, in place of us and for us. Public servants are our alter egos, doing those things we have decided that we do not wish to do ourselves or that we wish to be done explicitly for others.

2. Be careful about what you say in public. In Washington, very little is exempt from press coverage, almost nothing is confidential, and much less than is supposed to be is off the record. The words you use and impression you convey are completely out of your control, once you act.

"We Don't *Have* the Best"

Now we're at the heart of the issue.

It may be the rare person who *says* that we don't *need* the best people in government, as did the director of the Office of Personnel Management in a well-publicized incident some years ago.

But there are many people who believe that we do not *have* the best people in government, and they extend beyond political appointees to the general public.

The image of the lazy, slothful, dull bureaucrat is everywhere. Without much effort (certainly without much thought), a continual stream of negative commentary in every aspect of public life transforms individual civil servants into an unflattering composite image: the *bureaucrat.*

It's understandable. The out party has to run against the in party, uncover poor performance in the incumbent administration, and promise improvement in a new administration.

What isn't understandable is why poor performance, to the extent that it exists, is always attributed to civil servants rather than to their elected and appointed political leaders.

A look at the facts, focusing squarely on the comparative performance of private versus public sector employees, is worthwhile.

In the early 1980s, a survey was conducted that should be required reading for all incoming political appointees.

The survey was designed and carried out at as a learning exercise by students at the George Washington University School of Public Administration under the direction of the chair of its Public Administration Department, Kathryn Newcomer.

It compared the performance of public and private sector workers, and was based on responses from political appointees from both Democratic and Republican administrations.

The survey showed that in every category of job performance, appointees of both parties rated the civil servants who worked for them at least as well as their private sector employees.

If the facts are important, they are already in.

Recommended Responses

1. Since most appointees conclude their service to the government with a reasonably good view of public servants, it would be useful if an effort were made to incubate this more positive view closer to the beginning of their service. This might be done through a bipartisan initiative. It might be an institutional approach—someone or some entity might provide some initial introductory seminars or training. Time could be spent more efficiently in serving the public if less time were spent criticizing the bureaucrats.

2. It is not likely that political campaigns will cease to criticize "the government bureaucracy." But those institutions that are a part of the accountability process, such as the press and interest groups, should do a better job of reminding the public that the government bureaucracy includes *both* civil servants and political appointees.

"GPRA Is Just Paperwork"

There has always been a strain of thinking to the effect that the Government Performance and Results Act is "just a bunch of paperwork."

GPRA, it will be recalled, requires agencies to produce strategic plans, annual plans, and annual reports whose central focus is the use of performance measures to manage progress toward outcomes (results).

Since its enactment, the law has been implemented with varying degrees of enthusiasm by both parties.

It's hard to see why support has been so uneven.

Imagine a president who wakes up one morning and finds that a new law has been delivered to his doorstep requiring every agency to have plans, goals, measures, and reports. One can envision a state of the union message in which reference is made to the progress being made "getting the government under control."

It seems like a win-win—good politics and good management. The law does require some paperwork. It does take some time and resources. The documents produced to date are not perfect. Specific instances of improvement in management or service quality are sometimes elusive.

But the law provides a legal foundation for good management, especially for accountability; much progress has been made since the law's enactment in 1993; and in management terms, the initiative is still relatively young.

Many feel that the implementation of the law is on a reasonable and predictable path and that additional increments of progress will be in direct proportion to the priority given to GPRA.

Much has been achieved. All over the government, a corps of individuals has acquired an understanding of strategic planning, performance measures, and performance-based management. New management systems have been developed, including new budget account structures.

Executive branch program managers and legislative appropriations committees have been slower to respond, but it's their backyard that's getting redone, and enthusiasm can hardly be expected.

Recommended Responses

1. The Government Performance and Results Act is a law. Performance-based management techniques are taking root all over the world. The private sector is ahead of government in many areas. Citizens deserve the best performance that can be delivered. GPRA deserves proactive leadership priority.

2. Political appointees have a responsibility to manage the organizations and programs for which they are responsible—not just to design and implement the incumbent administration's new initiatives and

policies. Some part of this management responsibility should go beyond making day-to-day decisions to include improving the management systems themselves. Career civil servants cannot make institutional improvements by themselves; the needed priorities and resources are beyond their reach.

"Performance Management Is a Fad"

It may be.

But if it is, it's been around a long time, it's all over the world, and it's in the private sector as well.

In the United States, it began in earnest at the federal level in 1993 with the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act. But we were by no means the first to get into it. The governments of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada began much earlier. Great Britain got into it in a substantial way. And today governments as diverse as those in Hong Kong, Singapore, France, and Germany, as well as countries in South and Central America, are engaged.

Sometimes called performance management, performance-based management, performance measurement, or just results-based management, a performance orientation is emerging all over the world.

It appears to be part of an emerging trend in which economic competition among nations and companies, supported by advances in communication and information technology, is creating a global market base in which performance is both an enabler and a driver.

As different parts of the world are drawn together in the economic system, there is a need for a common business language in which fundamental concepts of accountability, efficiency, and quality are known and adhered to.

In some parts of the world, such a language does not exist. In order for the economic resources of these areas to enter the world market, they must learn to speak this language.

Similar pressure is being felt by the public sector. Governments all over the world—though they may have the added responsibility of dealing with issues of social policy, social equity, and social service delivery—are feeling the pressure to focus on improving their performance.

The questions are: Can it be done cheaper? Faster? Better? Performance-based management focuses heightened attention on these questions through the use of performance goals and measures. It has been said that what gets measured gets done.

Is this a fad? Maybe. There have been management improvement strategies before "performance management," and there will be others to come.

The real question for anyone managing a public enterprise (or any other sector) ought to be: What can I get done with the tools available to me? In this light, the question need not be what do I need to do for performance management but what can performance management do for me.

Recommended Responses

1. Performance-based management/measurement is all over the world in both the public and private sectors. Administrators of the public business, and especially the elected and appointed officials whose responsibility it is to lead that business, should acquire and maintain an awareness of emerging management trends, and be able to assess, choose, and apply those that will be of benefit to the U.S. government and economy.

2. A management initiative that emphasizes goals, measures of performance, and results can't be all bad; if nothing else, it is the law. It's hard to see how this kind of focus, effectively led and managed, can do anything but help political leaders to accomplish their goals. A good starting point for incoming political leaders would be to get a copy of the Government Performance and Results Act itself, and keep it close at hand.

"GPRA Has Not Been Effective"

Are you sure?

What are your criteria? What could one reasonably expect?

The Bush administration which took office in 2001 judged GPRA not to have lived up to its potential.

The law could not officially be declared useless, however, because it seems so right (who can be against government programs having clear goals and measurable results?) that it would be hard to get rid of. And it provides the legal foundation for a set of core processes central to any management improvement initiative.

The policy seems to be to let the law run its course, and use it to the extent that it supports the President's Management Agenda.

There is nothing wrong with this approach. A given administration is not required to carry out all laws with enthusiasm.

But the judgment that GPRA has not been effective is premature.

The negative reaction to GPRA seems to have arisen largely as incoming political appointees looked at their agency's strategic plans, annual plans, and annual reports, and found them wanting. This is a little like coming upon someone who is in the middle of getting dressed, and saying he or she is not fully clothed.

GPRA requires learning. What is a strategic plan? How do you measure a program outcome? What kind of report will be effective? If the plans and reports looked bad in 2000, imagine what they looked like in 1996. The point is that an initiative such as GPRA cannot be implemented overnight. New skills have to be learned. New processes established.

What is the relationship of the work done under GPRA to the law itself? To the political appointees in charge?

Who or what is responsible?

Is it the law? Is it the career civil servants? Their political leaders? Both?

Recommended Responses
1. A little political art is needed. The practice of simply placing the previous administration on the floor and jumping up and down on its lifeless corpse is lacking in political art. It's a little too much. There are so many other ways to make a point if one needs to be made. A good rule of thumb is: Don't make sweeping criticisms of the previous administration's activities without making a credible point in a credible way—with some facts and analysis.

2. Make sure you have made a reasonable allowance for the time required for a given management reform to take effect. It is still too early to pass judgment on the Government Performance and Results Act.

Any management initiative needs to be assessed in relation to a set of reasonable expectations. Much progress has been made to date. In particular, much learning has taken place and expertise gained in developing strategic plans, annual plans, and performance measures. Today the single most important remaining challenge is not the design and installation of goals and measures, but their use in improving decision making—and that responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of political leaders.

"We Have Our Own System"

There are places in the government where some form of performance-based management has been used for some time.

It is not unusual to find some form of performance requirement in many types of programs—including direct and block grants, as well as credit, regulatory, and research activities. These requirements range from specific performance criteria to fairly unstructured performance reporting.

Some agency functions are more oriented toward performance measurement than others. Scientific, medical, and research programs are among them.

These agencies are data and methodology centric; they use information and measurement techniques all the time. Many were initially no more friendly to the performance measurement requirements of the Results Act than other agencies, but a few took the position that their existing performance information was sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the law.

GPRA calls for outcome measures. This is a pretty high standard.

But at least one large area of the government has stood out over the last 10 years for its insistence that:

- It already has a performance-based management system.

- The system has been in place for a long time.

- Everything is under control.

That agency is the Department of Defense (DoD).

The culture at DoD traces its performance-based management to the days of Robert McNamara and the "whiz kids."

But the press and others still report cost overruns, planes that don't fly, weapons that don't work, and strategies that are not effective.

It is hard to criticize the armed forces, the people who protect our country and way of life, our own sons and daughters who may be risking their lives.

But there is an attitude that is unique to the defense culture.

An example: A nationally known expert on performance measurement gave a presentation on the subject at a conference. His presentation impressed a representative of the Navy who asked that he come and make the same presentation to his boss, an admiral. At the appointed time and place, the presentation was made to the admiral, who sat at the end of a very long table with his senior staff sitting bolt upright on each side. At the end of the presentation, there was a long silence. The admiral then looked to the men on his left and then to the men on his right and said, "We've got this covered, haven't we?" At which point

both flanks of the table came alive with concurring body language and "yes sirs." The admiral got up and left the room without acknowledging the presenter.

Recommended Responses

1. However unintended, there is an appearance of arrogance in some areas of the Department of Defense and the armed services. Those in the military ought to consciously be on guard against giving the appearance that they have everything under control. In a world increasingly at risk of terrorism, the ability of the military to protect the country may increasingly depend on humility, as there is a greater and greater need to leverage the active participation of the general population.

2. There is a widespread perception that while the Department of Defense may have a long tradition of performance management, its techniques are in need of updating. Incoming political appointees would do well to review whatever performance management system they find in their area of responsibility and come to their own conclusion about its comparability to what is happening in the private sector and in other areas of the government. If nothing else, the current emphasis on strategic planning and outcome measurement—which would include strategies for postwar rebuilding—needs to be more in evidence.

"It Doesn't Help Me"

This may very well be the case. Though it can sound like an offhand complaint, it can point to a very real problem.

Top-level political appointees are often dealing with issues that are not tied to the orderly world of performance-based management.

Performance-based management systems typically yield information on a predetermined schedule. The schedule may be monthly, quarterly, semiannual, annual—whatever has been determined to be the best compromise between information availability and management needs.

Typically, when information is urgently needed, it is suffused by a political or management crisis. The time frame is now.

A story breaks on the evening news or in the morning papers. Phones ring at the White House and at cabinet agencies. How big is this problem? How many people does it affect? What are we doing to fix it? How much will it cost? How long will it take?

Much of the life of both senior political appointees and senior career executives involves dealing with such urgent issues.

Yet our information systems do not take them into account. By and large, the federal government does not have performance reporting systems for *now,* and not a lot of thought has been given to how that might be provided.

But these are legitimate needs, and any well-designed performance-based management system should take them into account.

Recommended Responses

1. Some proportion of the resources allocated to designing, installing, and using performance measurement systems should be reserved for ad hoc needs. A very small percentage—probably in the single digits—would probably be enough.

2. Top-level appointees should convene executives under them whose operations have ongoing performance management and measurement activities and systems to communicate their priorities and interests. Simply making these known would not only provide direction but stimulate engagement and perhaps even build momentum. There may not be a great deal that can be done in terms of tweaking the system to focus on new priorities. But the chances are that something can be done, and that would be a step in the right direction.

Designing Performance Indicators

Deciding on what performance indicators will be used to track program progress is often seen as a complicated and largely "methodological" activity, one that requires professional expertise in empirical and analytical techniques.

This may or may not be so.

Some program activities may require sophisticated techniques.

Many others do not.

Most should not.

The basic thrust of the Government Performance and Results Act was to help managers to manage, not to empower experts to analyze, evaluate, and ruminate.

Political appointees are the highest-level executives accountable to the American public for the management of public resources. Tracking performance is one of their most important responsibilities.

With or without the assistance of experts, appointees need to understand the issues, select the measures, and be able to explain the measures chosen—themselves.

Experts will almost never agree. All stakeholder views cannot be fully satisfied. Performance indicators can never tell the whole story by themselves. Resources almost always limit choices.

Top leaders need to step forward and accept full accountability.

"It's Not My Job to _____"

This kind of reaction can be found at all points in the performance management process, from design to use. It is taken up here because this stage in the process—the design stage—is pivotal to all that follows, and if there is one point in the process where political leadership and accountability is needed, it is at this stage.

This is because the emphasis in performance-based management almost everywhere, and especially in relation to the Government Performance and Results law, is on the measurement of progress toward outcomes. These are the intended results of the program, the services required by and provided to citizens.

The word *required* may seem strange and needs a word of explanation. It is not often used in contemporary discourse. It is used here to remind us that public services are not provided because they return a profit on investment, but because some element of the body politic supports them, wants them, needs them, or should have them.

So, delivering services—most of which are required by law—is one of the most important aspects of managing the government.

Since it is of great importance, political leaders should participate in and be accountable for the efficient and effective management of the programs through which those services are delivered.

Performance measures provide this accountability.

The better such measures are designed, the more likely it is that the desired performance will be achieved.

To be sure, the political process itself provides a substantial measure of accountability, as elections register voter approval and indicate priorities.

But performance measurement is where the rubber meets the road. What gets measured gets done—for the American people.

Recommended Responses

1. Politically appointed program managers should make it a point to acquire a basic understanding of performance measurement, including the design of performance measures. There is a language of performance measurement emerging all over the world that needs to be mastered and understood before it can be effectively applied. This would not be an arduous task. Reading one or two articles, a chapter in a book, or a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report would go a long way.

2. If there is one thing appointees should pay urgent attention to it is any information having to do with the performance of

services they deliver to citizens. They should become masters of all major sources of information about their programs, from internal management information systems to external reports, articles, stories, and books.

"My Role Is Political"

This is a variant of the "It's Not My Job" reaction, but it is so prevalent and important as to merit separate consideration.

Sometimes it is deeply felt and deeply believed.

And it is often the case that it is accompanied by hard, long, and self-sacrificing work on behalf of the political agenda. One can admire the integrity of the position as well as the hard work.

But it is just plain wrong.

Political appointees are not just responsible for politics and policy. They are also responsible for management, and this includes processes and systems.

Management processes and systems require constant attention. Capital investments have to be made. Long-terms plans need to be developed and managed to conclusion. Many things having to do with management cannot be accomplished on a neat four-year (or 18-month) cycle, but if they are never started, they will never get done. Moreover, some level of responsibility needs to be accepted in regard to management initiatives initiated under previous administrations. This does not mean each administration must accept everything done by previous ones in relation to investments in management processes and systems; but it certainly does mean that it needs

to be carefully considered within a context of responsibility that rises above a given political term.

The government, after all, serves all of us, all of the time.

Many political appointees come into government, serve their terms, and leave, without ever really accepting responsibility for the well-being of the management processes and systems under their control, or, perhaps more accurately, without accepting responsibility for more than the policy and political dimensions of their departments, programs, and functions.

They do not want to be seen as bad managers, and, for the most part, they are not. But neither would one say that they are notably good managers or exceptional managers. Looking back over a 30- or 40-year career, many career public servants can count on one hand the number of appointees who really rolled up their sleeves; mastered the details of a given management process, structure, or program; and took some risks to improve its management.

Recommended Responses

1. Political appointees need to see themselves as management executives as well as political and policy leaders. It's a whole new concept involving different skills and different work. It is often not as exciting as

political and policy work. It does not often energize the ego. Much is done without recognition. But it is very important.

2. A good strategy would be to pick out one or two management areas for priority attention. These might be areas of special expertise or interest. Focusing on a small number would help to assure that something gets done. Let it be known that these are the things you are interested in. Let it be known that you see this as your "long term" contribution to the institution of government, not related to party politics and policies. And then ask for help. You'll probably be pleasantly surprised by the enthusiastic response from career professionals.

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"Our Stuff Is Really Tough"

In practice, this remark, made by a senior political appointee, is delivered a little more artfully than it used to be.

In the early stages of GPRA implementation, the statement would simply have been, "You can't really measure our programs." Everyone was struggling with initial attempts at measurement, and this was a fairly routine response.

Today, the full statement would more likely be, "Well, of course, we do have measures for our GPRA plans and reports, and we track things pretty closely for the President's Management Agenda, but, you know, it's really hard to measure what we do."

So there has been some progress. But the notable aspect of both responses is the distance they imply between the political appointee and his or her agency's performance measurement activity. Measurement is something that happens over there, in the GPRA and PMA areas. Measurement is "pretty complicated."

Performance measurement as a priority activity worthy of the personal attention of a department or agency head, as something that is essential to good management and good public administration, is less in evidence.

If it were more in evidence, we would have more of a sense from senior political leaders that they are genuinely engaged in coming to grips with challenging measurement issues. We would feel engagement and commitment.

We would hear something like this:

> You can't really measure many programs, and I'm not sure measurement is the issue so much as management. GPRA was intended to improve the quality of service delivery. We don't have the resources—no one does—to design and use perfect "measures." Perfect measures would be very expensive, and there has been no separate appropriation for GPRA, so we have to do the best we can with what we have. But working with what we had, we chose these measures, for these reasons, and we are open to suggestions as to how we can improve them.

Recommended Responses

1. Senior leaders should be fully engaged in the process of designing and using the performance measures for their most important programs. They owe the public no less. Performance measurement is in the first instance a leadership activity. And in the second instance it is an accountability function. Both rest squarely on the shoulders of agency leaders.

2. Not only should leaders understand the issues related to the measurement of their own programs, but they should have a working understanding of the measurement of similar and related programs in other agencies and in other countries. If the United States is to enjoy a position of leadership in today's world, how can that be done without an awareness of how similar activities are managed elsewhere.

"It's Hard to Measure Research"

The history of this issue over the last 10 years is fascinating, and illustrative of continuing confusion in some aspects of performance-based management.

Early on, there was a strong feeling among some GPRA framers that research should perhaps be treated differently from other activities.

Paralleling this was the related thought that GPRA was intended to help managers to manage, rather than measurers to measure.

Had the two thoughts come together, it would have been recognized that the issue was not how to measure research but how to manage it.

And recall that the word *measure* crept into usage in place of the intended word *indicators*.

While the thought of managing research is still very uncomfortable for researchers, it is less uncomfortable than the thought of measuring it.

And, in the years since, the sense that even the most challenging activities, such as research, can benefit from the application of GPRA requirements has grown in acceptance.

From this perspective, some sense of strategy (as in strategic plans), some sense of planned annual activities (as in annual plans), and some type of annual reporting against intended goals (as in annual reports that include information on progress toward outcome measures) are appropriate.

During this same period, echoes of this issue could be heard on the Hill, where some thought that research programs should be more closely monitored. Agencies as diverse as the National Science Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution have come under congressional scrutiny in relation to their selection (read *performance*) criteria for awarding grants.

From this perspective, the research community needs to acknowledge that a scientist with a grant is a citizen to whom the resources of other citizens have been assigned for responsible pursuit of research activities in the national interest, whether basic or applied.

The peer review process is not sufficient to satisfy this responsibility, because it is a closed community wherein a closed group of citizens with a vested interest in a very specialized activity talk to themselves.

In short, scientists of all types have a responsibility to give some thought to how they communicate what they are doing to their fellow citizens. Truly impressive and pioneering research is at increasing risk because the scientists doing it are not communicating the value of their activities.

It may be that GPRA requirements for a strategic plan, annual plan, and annual report focusing on outcomes may have to be seen in the light of the research context. But the research community needs to make a credible effort at communicating what it is doing.

The issue, more so with research than many other areas, is not so much measurement or even management as it is communication.

Recommended Responses
1. Basic research: The spirit, if not the letter, of GPRA is appropriate, and it is growing more and more necessary in today's legislative and management environment. Rarely do those engaged in basic research simply show up in their laboratories and throw chemicals together to see what happens. They start with questions, hunches, and unexplainable processes. There is no reason why these cannot be recorded in terms of what is to be addressed, what actually takes place, and next steps based on findings. Individual researchers should maintain a simple log explaining what they are going to do, why, and what the result is.

2. Applied research: The recommendation above applies with added responsibility. And an effort should be made to collect information about the effect of the application. Sometimes this will be available in statistical form. At other times, it will be available only in the form of stories about exceptional effects. Both are valuable and can be starting points. Clearly, direct cause-and-effect attribution cannot be definitively established without experimental and control groups, which would be expensive and take too long. But such statistics and stories as can be gathered would be a good start.

"People Don't Agree"

Truer words were never spoken, but that's one of the major issues performance-based management is meant to address.

Interestingly, this viewpoint used to be expressed a little differently several years ago. Then the comment most often heard was, "It's hard to get people to agree."

There's a difference of considerable importance. The earlier comment implies that some effort at trying to get people to agree is important. The current one is a kind of throwing up of the hands without much interest or effort.

In truth, there never really has been much effort to obtain and consider stakeholder views. But there have been some efforts and some good examples that opened the door to good things. The Veterans Benefits Administration did a survey of stakeholders that turned up some pretty frank feelings, and the resulting dialogue was considered beneficial for all concerned.

It is true that people don't agree. Congress has a point of view. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has a point of view. Interest groups, academic institutions, and stakeholders all have different points of view.

Each one of these points of view might be splintered into a number of additional views depending on the purpose for which measures are being designed.

There is nothing wrong with different points of view. This is normal and to be expected.

The whole purpose of stakeholder involvement is to reach some kind of understanding on the purposes and measures that are appropriate. It is *not* likely that complete agreement will be reached. It *is* likely that there will be some disagreement.

But failure to open a line of communication to stakeholders is not only poor politics but bad management and bad public service.

As public servants, elected and appointed officials in particular have a special responsibility to seek and take into account the views of citizens, in or out of the government.

Recommended Responses
1. Often stakeholder comments are not widely sought because of time and cost factors. The plan or report has to be done now. There is no money. But there are ways to open the door even in challenging circumstances. The best (but most expensive and time-consuming) method would be to have meetings with stakeholder groups. Alternatively (if a modest amount of time and money are available), a survey could be designed and mailed out, which could be followed with in-depth interviews to illustrate major points of view. A variant of this would be a letter sent to major stakeholders simply asking for their

views (as opposed to a survey containing a number of specific questions). And (if there is almost no time and money), a notice could be posted on the web asking for comments.

2. If there is no time, no money, and no possibility of seeking stakeholder input, the resulting product should be distributed broadly, explaining these circumstances and inviting comment on a retrospective basis. If this approach is taken, the invitation to comment should include a succinct statement of why the included measures were selected so that respondents can review the thought process as well as the specific measure.

"It's All Too Technical"

Well, if that's the way it looks to you, then you and your agency are on the wrong track.

This is not rocket science.

The Results Act was intended to help you manage government programs and report results to citizens.

If it does not do that, then there is something wrong with the way it is being implemented in your agency.

Emphatically, GPRA is not technical. It does not require technicians, scholars, consultants, or other sophisticated skills. Common sense—starting where you are, using what you have—would be a good effort. What makes sense to you? What do you think would make sense for the public?

Strategic plans can be as basic as: Where are you starting from? Where do you see your agency going? What do you have to do to get there? What don't you have? And how are you going to get what you need?

This is management 101. Many agency strategic plans do not even incorporate all of these basic elements. Almost all are missing some. There is no one-size-fits-all template or score sheet.

To give no thought to strategic issues during your tenure as an appointed public servant would be to ignore a pretty fundamental responsibility.

And the same goes for outcome measures. If it does not help you and your agency to communicate what you are doing to stakeholders—and especially to citizens—something is awry.

Remember, the basic purpose of a measure under GPRA is to report progress toward intended results, whatever it is that has been promised to citizens.

If the strategic plans and performance measures that come across your desk seem "technical," that should be a warning sign to you that your staff is off track.

They may have good reasons for proposing a measure that to you seems technical or not helpful in terms of your ability to manage or report. But those good reasons need to be assessed in relation to your practical sense of what will do the job.

Recommended Responses
1. It is always wise to get some feedback from key stakeholders. The more the better. If there are political reasons why you cannot do this in a broad public way, then at least consider some one-on-one meetings or phone calls to key individuals and groups.

2. Send the proposal (strategic plan, annual plan, annual report, or outcome measure) to citizens in your hometown and get feedback from your department's constituents. Set up a small focus group. Go to a neighborhood or organization.

"No One Really Cares"

This comment is made in many forms. "Congress doesn't care." "My managers don't care." Sometimes even: "OMB doesn't care" (in spite of the President's Management Agenda and the Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART, process).

And the most potentially important of all: "The public doesn't care."

You know, there's only one way to answer these comments that suits the issue: So what?

This is one of those issues that is so important, so much a part of public service and being a public servant, that it ought to go to the top of your priority list no matter who says what.

The fact is that you do not *have* a job; it isn't yours. You've been given a trust. You do not *have* a budget; it isn't yours. You've been given it in trust.

You are a servant of the public—whether you are a Republican or a Democrat.

You hold the resources of citizens in trust to carry out the work they have assigned to you.

Sometimes it is useful to recall what individual citizens and taxpayers look like. They include executives and managers, plumbers and electricians, laborers and unskilled workers; the rich and the poor; mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts.

It would be a good thing if every time the government spent or managed a dollar, the face of a citizen appeared instead of George Washington.

Performance-based management is simple, fundamental, and familiar. All of us have some kind of family budget, or the idea of one in our heads. We have certain things we want to accomplish. And we track progress toward our goals with great interest.

That is all this is.

There may be numbers, terms, requirements, plans, and reports. But that is just the system of the United States government. That's the way things work in Washington.

If you don't like the requirements for GPRA, the PMA, and PART, don't ignore the worthwhile purpose they serve.

It is your most fundamental responsibility.

Recommended Responses

1. All political leaders, and especially those in significant leadership positions, should proactively support and advance the concept of performance in government management and service delivery. If there is some lack of attention, enthusiasm, or acceptance, then apply the same political art that got your party elected. Politics and management at the leadership level is in some part an art form. Be persuasive. Attract people to the cause. Build a coalition. Develop common ground for different points of view. Pay at least as much attention to getting performance management effectively established in your agency as you did to getting your party elected or being appointed to your present position.

2. Try to go out and see some of the programs and organizations where performance-based management is working well in the public and private sectors. When you see how good it can be when it is done well, how great are the benefits in terms of improved service and reduced costs, your enthusiasm will get the best of you, and you'll go at it with renewed energy. Try it and see.

"My Deputy (Secretary) Does That"

The surest way of not accomplishing your top priorities is to entrust them to someone else, no matter how competent, loyal, or highly placed that person is.

That's true everywhere in life, and it's true in Washington.

But many do just that. Secretaries assign the "management" of their department to deputy secretaries while they handle the "political side."

Speeches, appearances on radio and TV, answering phone calls and letters, and going to important social events jam the schedules of top political leaders.

It's seductive. You're important. Your agency is responsible for thousands of employees, millions of people, and billions of dollars.

There is only one person who will take your top priorities as seriously as you do, and who will be as effective in carrying them out—and that is you.

The only question, then, is whether setting performance goals, designing performance measures, and managing toward performance results is important to you.

How can they not be.

You must have a short list of top priorities. And you must work systematically toward them, no matter how many other demands there are from other sources.

It has been said that what gets measured gets done.

Measures can help you. Put them where you want to go. Refer to them. Check progress against them. Ask for help to achieve them. Let it be known that they are your priorities.

Your leadership position vests you with the ability to set priorities and to have them paid attention to by your staff.

This advice is passed along from former to new political appointees repeatedly: You can come to Washington, show up at the office every day, stay out of trouble, go to social events, and leave a good fellow. Or you can come to Washington and use your position to accomplish things. And if you try to get things done, you will find that you will have to fight to keep your priorities on the table.

Performance goals and measures are a way to keep your priorities at the top of everyone else's list.

Recommended Responses

1. Don't assign away to someone else all of the responsibility for day-to-day management. Reserve the most important issues for yourself, using your deputy as your assistant. Clearly state your top priorities, and develop specific goals and measures for each. Overlay these goals across your existing management structures and processes.

2. You can give your priorities an enormous boost by walking around and talking to the people who are working on them. Have someone draw up a chart that shows all the people working on each of your priorities. Include everyone from the lowest clerk to the highest executive. Reserve 30 minutes three times a week to walk into the office of one of these people completely unannounced. Pick an office worker one week, an executive the next. Make it person to person, not political appointee to staff. Make human contact. Follow up with a note. Mention what is being discussed at your executive staff meetings. Express appreciation. You'll be amazed at the effect on morale and productivity.

"The PART Is Not about Measures ..."

"it's about results"—goes this odd but not uncommon remark.

To those who have followed the evolution of performance-based management in the federal government, this remark seems to come from left field; nevertheless, it is being made.

And, more importantly, it is sometimes part of a broader attitude that relates measures to the Government Performance and Results Act and then relates GPRA to the previous administration—as distinguished from the President's Management Agenda, which is this administration's approach … sometimes leaving the question unanswered as to whether measures are or are not part of the PMA.

And, if that paragraph is hard to follow, it accurately conveys some contemporary thinking at very high political levels.

It is easy to make the situation clear.

The Government Performance and Results Act is a law and requires performance measures.

GPRA is the legal foundation for much of the PMA.

The Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART, uses the budget process to drive performance metrics through all kinds of management systems, levels of government, and types of programs.

The President's Management Agenda, through the PART, focuses squarely on results, specifically looks for measures, emphasizes the need for data and analysis to confirm them, and provides examples. Succinct OMB commentary on each of these elements may be found in the Performance and Management Assessments, which are used to summarize the PART analysis for each program.

In fact, a close look at the PART requirements might lead to this conclusion: The guidelines press hard against existing law, regulation, and practice in the pressure that they place on grantees and subgrantees not under direct federal authority to accept a fair share of accountability for performance where federal dollars are involved.

In general, the word *measurement* is less in use today than earlier, being to a substantial extent subsumed under the word *results*. But the pressure is far stronger today than earlier to have data, analysis, and program evaluation studies to track performance.

Recommended Responses
1. Agency leaders should read through the PART instructions and guidelines. They are stunningly focused on program management, results, and the quality of information available to document both. They are not theoretical or overly focused on analytical methodology. But they are seriously and intensely focused on management, results, and information.

2. Leaders should also read half a dozen of the PART analyses. They are not long. They are well formatted and very clear. They ask for fundamental information—the kind of information every citizen should have and every public administrator should provide for every government program.

Aligning Management Processes

Effective management starts with account-ability; accountability starts with alignment; alignment means clear lines of responsibility coordinated to achieve specific objectives.

It seems so clear.

So simple.

But many new political appointees find management processes that are anything but "aligned."

They are "shocked," "appalled," "confused," and "dumbfounded" by "the mess" in Washington.

Well, it's true. It isn't perfect. It's very imperfect.

Congress passes laws and assigns them to agencies. Agencies grow by accretion. It's not necessarily a rational process.

But performance-based management can help, and in fact is ideally suited to help in this context.

GPRA requires goals and measures of performance, which, in turn, can be used to establish clear lines of accountability without requiring a "reorganization" of structures, processes, or accounts. This may lead to or be accompanied by a reorganization, but it does not require it.

This can be an enormous benefit to appointees. With an average tenure of 18 months, a political appointee who decides on a reorganization may not be around to see it through.

"This Organization Is a Mess"

If you think your organization is a mess, that your bureaus, divisions, offices, and branches seem not to reflect an ordered intelligence, you are experiencing one of the most common reactions among incoming political leaders who have no previous Washington experience.

The organizational structure of many agencies often presents a jumbled, sometimes haphazard appearance.

You will do yourself, your organization, and your party a favor by not blaming the people who work in those units and by not assuming that "they" have deliberately cluttered the landscape for their own malevolent purposes.

Departments, bureaus, agencies, and organizational units do not emerge whole from some scientifically pure design process.

They are created piecemeal over long periods of time as the congressional and executive branches of government set and reset their respective priorities. Overlay the changing interplay of these tension-filled forces with the constant coming and going of political parties and the melding, unmelding, and remelding of the relationships between senior career civil servants and senior political appointees, and the outcome may seem more understandable.

Nor is "reorganization" a likely solution, at least not in the short term—and that is all many political leaders have.

The time and energy likely to be lost in connection with a reorganization should be carefully weighed against the likely benefits. This does not mean that processes and structures should not be redesigned, but large-scale reorganizations should be approached with caution.

The assumption of new duties and responsibilities takes time. You will need to work out relationships with a new group of managers. If moving people to new duties reflects the same patterns as hiring people for new duties, many of those placed in new positions will not work out as hoped, perhaps as many as 50 percent.

And, in the meantime, you have scared the creativity and risk-taking impetus right out of the organization—the very qualities you need for top-level performance.

Recommended Responses

1. Performance-based management, carefully focused around a small set of priority goals and measures, can be an effective strategy. Use performance-based goals and measures to overlay a fuzzy organization with a sharp focus.

2. Establish teams made up of units, parts of units, and individuals in the way that you feel offers the best chance to achieve your goals. Leave the existing structure alone. Hold regular team meetings and allow all top executives and as many non-executives as possible to attend. This will partially satisfy those who may be offended by the fact that their subordinates are on the team while they are not.

3. Put in place some kind of incentive structure that rewards team performance.

"Our Account Structure Doesn't Work"

Unfortunately, this is true in many agencies, and it is by no means a perception held only by political leaders. Career public servants and almost anyone else knowledgeable about the federal government has a similar view.

In many agencies, the account structure is impenetrable. In some agencies today, there are chief financial officers and budget office directors who will tell you in an informal moment that they really don't know what is happening with the flow of dollars through their accounts except in the most general way.

Here are some of the remarks heard on this issue:

- All I know is that's about what they get every year.

- I don't exactly know what happens with that money.

- That's a deal we have with the Appropriations Committee.

- The ranking member insists on funding that.

- That office never responds to the budget [office's] call.

- I had to guess at that; we have no idea what the runout costs are.

CFOs and senior budget officers can be pretty lonely jobs. They often live in the middle of a chaos that would not stand close scrutiny, and they know it.

But it's hardly their fault.

Agency account structures reflect the same ebb and flow of politics and policies as do agency organizational structures. The two—structures and accounts—are often closely linked. Congress passes a law. An agency creates an organizational unit and an account line. A new cabinet secretary has a priority and creates a new subunit with a new sub-account line.

Organizations and accounts once created are hard to separate, revise, or abolish. If you are the manager of a unit with an account, whether it's rational or not, it's hard to say it doesn't make sense. It's your job.

From the standpoint of performance-based management, however, a messy account structure cannot simply be walked away from. Knowing the costs of goods and services delivered to the public is important, especially since as public servants—political or career—we manage public funds in trust, on behalf of our fellow citizens.

It is incumbent upon political leaders to take some positive steps to improve financial accounting and the attribution of costs.

Recommended Responses

1. For the short term, some steps should be taken to rationalize financial planning and cost attribution. This may well involve preparing an overlay to the existing budget that seeks to rationalize the structure and uses informed best estimates as a temporary measure. There is nothing wrong with estimates as long as the process for generating them is exposed to full public view. Do something and tell how you did it.

2. For the longer term, some steps should be taken to develop a better account structure. Given the fact that any structure will inevitably be superseded by unfolding events, it will probably be wise to develop a data-based system that has the flexibility to change. At some point, OMB will probably have to develop an overarching structure based on a generic list of core public services with uniform accounting practices for each.

"Performance Budgeting Is a Dream"

This statement, made in an unguarded moment by a high-ranking political appointee, is an extreme expression of a very widely held feeling.

It is made more significant by the fact that the person who said it is a veteran appointee, having served in several administrations, and is experienced in budget operations.

Given the widely acknowledged "messiness" of organizational and accounting structures in the government and the widely understood reasons for them, serious expectations that performance-based budgeting will ever be a reality are rare, despite mantras and scorecards to the contrary.

Putting aside for the moment some of the obviously not helpful feelings and inclinations this kind of remark suggests—including discouragement, cynicism, narrow vision, and lack of commitment to the future of government—there remains a more serious problem.

There is a widespread perception that performance budgeting is only or predominantly an accounting issue.

Starting from this perspective, the road ahead is long and daunting. Federal account structures are a mess. They will take time to fix. Agencies cannot fix their structures unless the government itself (OMB) changes its accounts. Eventually, Congress will have to buy in.

But it is the right way to go, and everyone else is going there, all over the world in the public and private sectors. If we cannot efficiently and effectively align and attribute costs, we will not only waste public resources but also be unable to transact business.

Steps have to be taken now toward the long-term goal of account restructuring. Some agencies have taken giant steps toward account redesign and activity-based costing. Many others have done much less.

Often overlooked is an enormous present, real-time opportunity. Before performance budgeting is an accounting issue, it is an attitude, a mind-set, and a process.

We can talk and think about performance budgeting now. In many ways the dialogue is the substance of the intended goal. Having aligned accounts is an important but not necessary element of performance budgeting. Aligned account structures will make performance budgeting easier; their absence does not prevent it.

Robust, engaged, dynamic, intense dialogue at every level within federal agencies about the relationship between costs and results would be a magnificent outcome. That dialogue alone would be a great achievement.

There are many ways to discuss costs without having a perfect account system. Costs can be estimated, extrapolated, benchmarked, hypothesized, and modeled.

Former OMB Director Mitch Daniels captured the essence of what is needed when he called for a "spirited dialogue" about costs and results. We owe American citizens no less.

Recommended Responses

1. In addition to taking thoughtful and necessary steps toward eventual account restructuring, agency leaders should develop a specific capacity to estimate costs relative to results—in the absence of account alignment. They and their staffs should become experts in the techniques of estimation. They should know them, use them, and be able to defend them. There will be no perfect answers, but there ought to be well-considered ones.

2. Leaders should explicitly encourage dialogue about costs and results in their agencies. Leaders can create incentives by talking about performance budgeting, asking for ideas, expressing interest in those who are moving ahead. Forums might be established by program area or goal with the specific purpose of seeking new ways of thinking and encouraging the development of new ideas and methods.

"The PART Process Is a Pain"

That may be true. But if it is, it's the kind of pain you should have more of.

The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process is so right headed, so well intended, so reasonably conceived and managed, and so utterly in keeping with the spirit of public service, that it ought to be at the top of your priority, painful or not.

As OMB's latest and most advanced effort to support performance-based, results-oriented government, the PART has the potential for making a major positive contribution to improve government performance.

In the past, the budget process was a black box. The public, Congress, and even agencies knew little about how and why decisions were made. For the most part, only an agency's senior budget officer and a few very high-level political appointees really knew what transpired in the deliberations with OMB. Such information was closely held in no small part because it was something of a status symbol to be "in the know." For the agency's budget officer, who is normally a career civil servant, such information was a source of power and influence throughout the agency. Get on the wrong side of the senior budget officer, and you might not get a piece of information with important implications for your program.

What happened within OMB was also obscure. An agency might know how its own funding decisions were made, but it knew very little about the decisions relative to other agencies or about the process as a whole. The decision-making process within OMB lacked systematic structure, allowing significant variation from one budget officer to another.

The goal of the PART process is to provide a standard, structured, empirically based, public format for making budget decisions. Everyone can see what the process is. Everyone can judge whether OMB has made good decisions. All of this information is available to citizens.

Throughout the process of developing and implementing the PART, OMB has shown an unprecedented willingness to subject its thinking to wide and expert review. By and large, its decisions have been transparently motivated by a strong focus on effective, information-informed management, focused on results.

This is one pain all political leaders should bear without complaint. It's too important.

Recommended Responses

1. The PART process is the ultimate management alignment tool. Focused as it is on the connection between program objectives, goals, measures, and the management processes that link them, the PART can be a powerful lever for improved government performance. Rather than seeing the PART as another "paper exercise," agency leaders should actively use it to achieve worthwhile ends.

2. In particular, agency leaders should take a proactive approach to the entire PART process. OMB has said it will do PART reviews on 20 percent of the federal inventory each year for five years. Rather than wait for the PART process to come to them, agency leaders should take the process to OMB. This would give them the maximum amount of time to consider program design and management improvements in the public interest.

"There's So Much Duplication and Overlap"

That's true and not a bad starting point for a discussion of performance alignment, as long as you realize that duplication and overlap result from issues that are systemic and are not caused by incompetent bureaucrats who don't know how to manage programs.

Our governmental system is not designed to produce perfectly designed programs; it is designed to fairly represent the many and varied views of citizens. Through the process of counting votes, whether in municipal elections or in congressional deliberations, dissimilar interests are pushed and pulled into a semblance of agreement.

That imperfect product is then shipped off to an agency for implementation. Many decisions have to be made to get the process going. The political process often complicates an already challenging management—read *alignment*—issue. A cabinet secretary urgently wants to get the new money out to constituents, perhaps before a management information system can be designed. Maybe even before the content of the program is fully known.

There is nothing wrong with this system. It is the American political system at work.

Neither is it a reason to forgo honest effort at applying the principles of performance-based management.

If there are overlapping and duplicative programs and parts of programs, then common

sense demands that as the representatives of your fellow citizens now on watch—now in a position to see, understand, and remedy some of the unintended consequences of previous political processes—you take some affirmative steps toward improvement.

If someone else had your job in Washington, would you want them to throw up their hands and say, "This is a mess," or would you want them to make an effort to make it better?

Whatever you do will take courage and persistence. Programs are tied to money and no one wants to give up dollars. Those getting the dollars don't want to lose what they buy and those managing the programs that dispense them don't want to lose their jobs. Members of Congress will not be quiet. Businesspeople, as well as political and civic leaders, will express strong views. Resistance will be strong everywhere.

Recommended Responses

1. The most important strategic thing you can do to handle the challenge of overlapping and duplicative programs is to take the high road. No one can truly be against improving the effectiveness of public resources. Everyone will instantly resist an approach that looks to be entirely political, or that lacks careful thought and reliable data. Using sloppy language, letting irritation suggest condemnation, or indirectly pointing the finger at civil servants will not help.

2. Take some steps both within and outside your agency. Start in your own agency. Map out related programs. Meet with program directors. Understand clearly what each similar program does. Be able to explain how they relate to each other. Give each program the benefit of the doubt. Then add them up, and estimate results and costs on a comparative basis. Take some positive steps toward streamlining or consolidating. In regard to similar programs in other agencies, reach out to those agency leaders and see if you can begin a dialogue. You can't control whether your offer is accepted, but you can make the offer.

"We Have No Control Over That"

There is a line of thinking to the effect that if a program does not have a specific legislative requirement for performance measures, then there is no federal responsibility to track performance.

According to this view, many federal programs that channel funds to state and local governments through such mechanisms as revenue sharing, block grants, formula grants, and competitive grants—which do not have specific legislative requirements—were established with the specific purpose of providing maximum flexibility to recipients. Any encroachment on this flexibility is seen as being fundamentally at odds with the intent of the initial program design.

And, even if it is necessary or desirable to track performance in such programs, how can it be done when there are no specific requirements?

The first thing that can be said about this kind of thinking is that in today's world it seems both very conservative and very dated.

Twenty years ago, few would have disagreed. A formula grant program meant hands off from Washington. Most such programs had minimal reporting requirements.

Today, there is a growing sense that all programs need to have a performance dimension, even those that do not have specific legislative requirements for monitoring performance, as well as those that specifically prohibit federal data collection requirements.

This does not mean that the federal government can impose performance reporting where it is not legislatively authorized.

But it seems to mean almost anything else.

OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool includes a number of requirements that press for performance information. For example, in relation to formula, block, and competitive grant programs, it asks: "Does the program collect grantee performance data on an annual basis and make it available to the public in a transparent and meaningful manner?"

A recent notice from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to recipients of Community Development Block Grant funds provides detailed guidance on how to gather performance information, asks grantees to submit a plan for collecting performance data, and asks those grantees that are not collecting such data to explain why.

Clearly, grantees are not being "required" to have and use performance information, but just as clearly they are being asked to take proactive steps.

There seems to be a growing sense that the receipt of public dollars brings some fundamental aspects of accountability. A block, formula, or other grant program does not mean an exemption from the responsibility to spend dollars wisely. The funds do not "belong" to grantees as a matter of "right."

Recommended Responses

1. There are many ways to develop performance information, even where there are no specific legislative requirements. Pick out a program or activity and encourage the development of informal partnerships. Set up meetings and forums for discussion and information sharing. In the best circumstance, federal, state, and local grantees can work together without a specific legislative requirement. Some of this is already happening. State and local governments, seeing the increasing interest in performance management, are pressing upward toward their federal partners, and the federal government is pressing downward. These inclinations can be encouraged by all parties through joint ventures that may begin as nothing more than information sharing but that may mature into joint design and use of performance information.

2. If state and local governments show no interest in direct collaboration with the federal government, the collection and dissemination of good practices can be a very effective way to take an initial non-threatening step and jump-start a dialogue.

"We Can't Cost Things Out"

A large part of any effort to align management structures and processes to achieve the highest level of performance has to do with cost attribution.

In general, three things need to happen to lay the foundation for an effective performance system. First, the elements of an activity need to be identified, grouped, and sequenced. Second, an accountability system needs to be superimposed over the sequence. And, third, each element in the sequence needs to be costed out.

Each of these steps brings its own challenges; none is easy. All of them involve imposing a performance logic chain over existing structures, processes, and customs. If organizational structures and processes are imperfectly aligned, having been created piecemeal as a result of legislative and political currents, they are at the same time entrenched and subject to enormous inertia.

In no area is this more apparent than in regard to the attribution of resources. Few owners of a structure, process, or budget will easily yield parts of their kingdoms to another kingdom, especially one as apparently ephemeral and mysterious as "performance management."

Put simply, no one wants to give up control of his or her budget.

But something on this order has to happen as the government moves toward a performance-based management system.

And it can be done.

The starting point is estimation.

If present accounting processes and structures do not provide cost information to support performance-oriented management, then the only starting point is estimation.

To do nothing, or to wait until account structures are redesigned while public dollars are flowing through the system with no one making any effort at gauging the flow, is not acceptable. Individuals would not do that with their own money; it shouldn't be done in government with other people's money.

Holding in mind the thought that the money you dispense and manage is not yours helps to fuel resolve and encourage action.

Recommended Responses

1. When you don't have all the data you need, estimate. Cost attribution is an essential aspect of performance-based management and a fundamental responsibility for the management of public resources. To do nothing because present accounting systems and structures are out of alignment or worse is to walk away from a public trust. Some effort at estimation needs to be made. There is likely no one right estimation method. Experts can be called in to help with technical issues. But it is likely that judgment calls will have to be made. As long as the method is documented so that others can see it and comment, a basic responsibility has been met. It is possible that feedback in relation to whatever is done will substantially improve the process.

2. Whatever cost-estimation method is used, a useful second step would be to compare the results to similar processes in and out of the government. These comparisons will be rough but may yield helpful information. They will certainly continue the process of learning about cost estimation and attribution.

"Our Data Systems Don't Match Up"

Often agency data systems are only slightly less disjointed than agency account structures.

And for many of the same reasons.

An issue arises and gathers extensive press coverage. Congress responds by creating a new program and presses for rapid implementation. Citizens and interest groups beat the drums. The incumbent administration finds itself in the glare of daily news coverage. The agency head gets a call from the Office of the President: "Just get it done; the press coverage has got to stop." Agency political leaders make it clear to their staff that money has got to hit the street pronto.

There is nothing wrong with this scenario. It is the American political system at work. The people speak and the government acts.

But there is something lost on the management side. Inside the agency, career public servants will have pointed out that there is a need for a management information system. Without it, they will argue, it will be difficult to manage the program properly. Any significant management problem that may arise will have the potential for becoming a political problem, because without proper management controls—including a good data system—the agency will be unable to document and analyze what is happening. It will look incompetent because it cannot describe the problem accurately.

In the heat of the moment, data is not a priority.

Sometimes there is enough time to design and implement an information system. But rarely will it be consistent with other existing systems, each of which was implemented under similar urgent conditions.

Sometimes the information systems implemented during one administration in one agency will be coordinated if the senior political executives have an interest in the issue. But rarely are they coordinated across administrations.

Information systems, like budget account structures, grow through accretion. They often reflect a patchwork of political emergencies and priorities.

They may be written in different computer languages, contain disparate data elements, and operate under varying protocols. Rarely is there a way to conveniently gather and analyze information across similar or related programs.

Eventually, government-wide standards will be necessary to support effective performance-based management.

Recommended Responses
1. As is the case in relation to rationalizing budget account structures, agency leaders need to accept some measure of responsi-

bility for the long term. It will take years to standardize existing management information systems. But some steps can and should be taken toward this long-term task. Commissioning a study of the existing systems and preparing alternative courses of action would be one starting point.

2. Something needs to be done in the short term as well. One approach would be to identify a short list of priority programs based on such criteria as importance and dollar amount. Then, using this short list, design a statistically significant sample of program beneficiaries for each. Based on this sample, standardize core data elements and extrapolate back to the universe. The results may not be useful for making individual decisions regarding benefits, but they can at least inform broad-scale management and policy decisions.

"There's No Accountability System"

It is an often-voiced lament among political appointees that they have no means for holding career civil servants accountable.

The lament continues: "Career civil servants are so hard to discipline and/or remove that it is not worth the trouble. Senior career civil servants are closely allied with congressional committees and private interest groups who will cause trouble on their behalf." And so on.

In fact, it is probably easier to discipline or remove a senior career civil servant in the government than it is to take the same steps in regard to an employee of a large private sector firm. (Note: The same cannot be said for less senior civil servants, who operate under a different tenure system.) Each sector has procedures to assure fair and orderly processing and adjudication.

And the highest-level career civil servants, those who are in the Senior Executive Service (SES), have no real tenure at all. When the SES was created, senior executives who opted to join the new system gave up a good deal of the protection they had enjoyed under the previous system in return, it was projected, for greater opportunities for career flexibility, advancement, and executive bonuses.

If there is a need to remove an SES executive, all that needs to be done is to offer a reassignment to some barren outpost, the least attractive field or operational unit in the system. If the offer is declined, the executive has no job. If it is accepted, he or she is out of the way.

This may sound brutal, but it is true.

The real reason that political leaders often do not take such steps is that they are not willing to take on the task. One can hardly blame them. It is not pleasant. Anyone who has ever managed an organization of any size understands that there are times when it has to be done.

But the ultimate step is not the only one available. Leaders have many accountability levers that are rarely used. Annual evaluation ratings, bonuses, and incentive systems can be very effective—if seriously applied.

And there are a whole host of such levers that are far more subtle, such as shining the sun on those who are going in the right direction and raining on others.

This is not rocket science.

To someone with some management experience in the public sector, the "I can't hold them accountable" lament is the sure sign of an amateur.

Recommended Responses
1. Unpleasant though it may be, political leaders should thoroughly acquaint themselves with the legal procedures for disciplining and removing an employee. There are some basic steps that must be followed. They are neither many nor difficult, but they are essential—such as

making written notations on a calendar or other format to document unacceptable performance.

2. There are many ways to establish accountability prior to taking disciplinary action. Incoming appointees should very soon develop a specific strategy for establishing accountability. Many come to Washington and leave without ever coming to grips with this issue. They seem to expect that since they are in the leadership role, others will carry out orders. It may be necessary to take specific disciplinary steps in at least one specific case to demonstrate your seriousness. Whatever the strategy, it should include a clear understanding of the process for disciplining or removing a persistently uncooperative or incompetent individual. In particular, disciplinary processes usually require some written record to support the action. If this is known in advance, it is very easy to make notations on an appointments calendar. If this is known and understood in advance, it is very easy to do; if it is not known, it can never be fixed.

Using Performance Information

An often-heard statement about performance information is that it is not actually used, that its primary utility is to fulfill the paperwork requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act.

Normally, those making this statement are outside observers. They are GAO analysts, OMB budget examiners, congressional staffers, or outside experts and observers.

We may take this as one order of magnitude on the GPRA implementation scale.

But when this kind of sentiment is expressed by a high-ranking political appointee, we have moved several orders of magnitude in the wrong direction.

Why?

Because if it is said by a cabinet secretary, deputy secretary, assistant secretary, or other high-ranking political leader, it is a de facto policy statement.

It tells us not only that *they* do not use it, but that they do not expect *others* to use it.

Clearly, they are not holding anyone accountable.

Clearly, they are not "leading" the charge for performance.

It really is—or ought to be—embarrassing: that it is said, that it is true, that nothing is done about it, that we all accept it.

The press, citizens, interest groups, congres- sional oversight committees, and citizens should demand more.

"My Managers Aren't Interested"

Well, you know, that's probably not far from the truth. But the real question is, "What are you going to do about it?"

In some ways, you and your managers are tied together. They are a mirror of you.

Would they even dare to show lack of enthusiasm if you had made it clear that performance measures and performance management are important?

Your managers are very busy. Many are managing large and increasing workloads with stable or declining staff and budget resources. Every new administration brings a new set of priorities and programs that must be added to a stable base. Some few catch the updraft of a new program or initiative that has a growing budget.

An investment in performance management without your making it a priority may not seem worth it.

Managers may feel that they already have a pretty good sense of what their program is doing. If they have been connected to a program for some period of time, they have many ways of staying on top of management, policy, and political issues.

One can wish they would be more proactive in relation to performance management, adhere to a higher sense of public service (GPRA is the law), and be more aware of the importance of a performance orientation in today's world.

But in the last analysis, the buck stops at your desk. If you said it was important, they would do it.

Sorry, there's no other way to say it.

And, you know, a few moments of reflection would undoubtedly lead you to conclude that performance-based management ought to be among your top priorities. Truly, when you reflect on your service in the government, how can you not ask what you stand for? What level of public service, professionalism, citizenship?

It is a well-known fact in Washington that many career managers are not going full out in support of performance-based management.

And everybody knows why.

Recommended Responses

1. Learn about performance-based management. Ask someone to pull together some reading for you. There's plenty of it. Find out what's happening around the world and why. Performance-based management is being driven by important economic, social, and technical forces that are reshaping world economics and politics. You need to know.

2. Set an example somewhere. Start with a program of special interest to you. Think it through. Seek expert advice. Ask the questions: How can the highest level of performance in this program be achieved?

What would be the best way to articulate its goals, define its objectives, and measure its performance? Talk about what you are learning, the decisions you are making, and the results you are getting. And it won't be long before some of your senior managers are telling you their experiences as well.

"It's Not Useful to Me"

This is truly a stunning statement.

It is all the more stunning because it is expressed at the highest levels among political appointees—not on formal occasions, but on enough informal ones that the message gets around.

Some of this is understandable. Let's make the case as well as we can:

- Top-level officials spend more time on politics and policy than management.

- The Government Performance and Results Act, the legal framework requiring performance measures, belonged to the Clinton administration.

- The President's Management Agenda belongs to the Bush administration.

Now let's make the case as it should be made:

- Top-level officials may spend more time on politics and policy, but they are also responsible for management.

- The Government Performance and Results Act is the law.

- The President's Management Agenda is so closely interwoven with the Government Performance and Results Act that the two cannot be separated. GPRA is the legal and management framework for the PMA.

And OMB's new budget process based on the Program Assessment Rating Tool uses the budget process to drive GPRA objectives, including performance measures, deep into the heart of management.

So the statement—"It's not useful to me"— reveals, at best, an incomplete understanding of the "utility" of performance information in today's management context.

But the statement is more important for what it reveals about both the state of the art in agencies and the attitude of agency leaders.

It is entirely possible that indicators and measures are not useful to top political appointees. The process of developing, installing, and using performance information is new. Top leaders of both parties have not been deeply involved in the process, instead relegating the task to subordinates, special assistants, and particular offices. If GPRA plans and reports look like paperwork, that's because they were often treated that way. In some agencies, the leader has never read any of the performance planning or reporting documents.

Performance information should be useful to political leaders. It should be among the most useful capacities they have for managing resources and communicating value to citizens. Having clear goals, objectives, and performance indicators ought to be a number one priority.

Recommended Responses

1. Top political leaders should be leading the charge to develop and use performance information. They are stewards of the public resources. They are here in Washington on behalf of their fellow citizens. This is a fundamental responsibility.

2. If, as sometimes is the case, a performance management information system does not yield information needed by a cabinet secretary or other official, either because it is not fully developed or because it does not have a specific piece of information needed in a given context, the system should be supplemented with an in-place capacity to provide the needed information.

   In short, if Congress calls, there needs to be a capacity to answer. No system will ever anticipate all eventualities. That is not a fault of the system, which cannot be all things to all people. But the system can and should be supplemented with an in-place staff capacity to provide information on an ad hoc basis through such methods as survey research, interviews, case studies, and analysis of existing data systems. Such a capacity should be directly available to those in need and able to respond within the often-urgent context of the moment. Congress, interest groups, and others have a right to ask questions and get answers.

"Congress Is Not Interested"

This is certainly true enough to be taken very seriously, although not as much as it used to be.

It tells us something important about the Congress.

The GPRA legislation originated in the Senate, where it was sponsored by the late Senator William Roth (R-Del.). There was never a groundswell of support for the bill, but there were a handful of senators and representatives who took an interest. Most of the early support in Congress came from Republicans; Democrats tended to feel it was an attempt to cut programs.

Reports by the Congressional Research Service and others have shown that the number of pieces of legislation and the number of committee reports that make reference to the Government Performance and Results Act are increasing. Occasional committee oversight hearings have been held in both houses of Congress on the Results Act. Some individual Hill staff have supported the idea of performance-based government, and several of them—such as Marcus Peacock and Robert Shea—took positions at OMB and continued to support the evolution of performance-management principles.

But it is certainly true that Congress has shown a modest level of interest. Several years ago at a retreat for congressional staff directors, the agenda included a session on progress under the Government Performance and Results Act. The staff directors in attendance listened and left. They had almost no questions. The few comments made revealed how completely uninterested they were not only in GPRA but in anything having to do with the management of programs in the executive branch.

One is left with the impression that their overriding concern is getting federal dollars to their districts.

The question is: Should this be their only concern? Should they not also be interested in the performance of the executive branch in managing the dollars they appropriate?

The answer has to be yes, even if it is not acknowledged.

And political leaders in the executive branch need to do the right thing and keep the issue of performance in front of the Congress, even when it shows no interest.

Many on the Hill steadfastly cling to the existing budget format not because it is better but because it is familiar and makes it easier for them to track money to their constituents. But these budget formats are as arcane as the agency accounting and organizational systems that produce them, and for exactly the same reason—Congress enacts a program and an agency adds a budget line; the momentum driving both is politics.

There's nothing wrong with politics, but there's nothing wrong with good management and good accounting, either.

Recommended Responses

1. This is one of those issues on which executive branch political leaders should bite the bullet and insist on taking steps to rationalize their budget presentations to Congress despite the anticipation that it will not be welcomed. One strategy is to present two budgets, one in the old format and one in the new, with a crosswalk between them. If this is done year after year, it will become increasingly difficult for congressional staff to argue that they cannot follow money to their favorite programs and districts.

2. Top agency leaders should put themselves on the line by going to the Hill themselves to talk informally with committee members and staff to explain why a performance-oriented format is in the best interests of everyone, including citizens. There is high ground to be claimed. Federal funds belong neither to the Congress nor an agency. Both are trustees for the citizens on whose behalf they serve.

"Citizens Aren't Interested"

This kind of remark is not often heard at high levels among agency political leaders.

But it is surprisingly common at mid levels in situations where political appointees are talking with career civil servants with whom they work on a day-to-day basis.

Often it is made within a context where a close working relationship has evolved and created an atmosphere of colleagueship. Shirtsleeves are rolled up and defenses down.

It is, however, a widespread feeling.

And not without justification.

Citizens are not rising up all over the country and demanding "performance indicators" and "strategic plans." Nor are they calling out for "outcome measures."

It is certainly true that most citizens are not aware of the Government Performance and Results Act.

All that being said, however, it is still surprising to hear the remark made. It is so fundamentally inappropriate.

One might ask: What piece of management improvement legislation do citizens respond to? What should they notice? The average citizen knows little about the day-to-day management of the government. Nor does he or she need to. What do citizens need to know of strategic planning and performance measurement, of program evaluation and financial accounting? Not much.

But they need to be assured that their tax dollars are being managed wisely, and those in the professional public service—whether political or career—must be able to account for their trusteeship.

Those in public service need to have performance measures whether citizens ask for them or not. They need them for themselves, to have a way of monitoring and documenting their activity.

Also, there is ample evidence that while citizens may not be calling for "performance measures" and "strategic plans," they are increasingly interested in results. They want to know that their government has accountability systems in place.

Survey after survey has shown that citizens do not feel their government is as effective or responsive as it could be. They do not look at the federal government as a "high-performing organization." Rightly or wrongly, they see government as being a distant second to private industry in terms of management capacity.

In general, people who work in government, whether political or career, do not think of citizens as often as they should. Probably they are too absorbed in trying to get the day's work done.

But all of them ought to think, talk, and act more within the context of their responsibility to the citizens they serve.

Recommended Responses

1. Study national demographic trends. All public servants should consider and learn more about our nation's citizens. How many are we? Of what age, income level, educational attainment, skill or profession? Where do we live—town or city, poor area or rich? What do we need in terms of social services? It is surprising how many come to Washington and leave having never really thought deeply about the characteristics of the citizen population.

2. Political leaders would do well to develop a specific strategy for communicating to citizens. Many give speeches to a wide range of groups, and so feel that they are making an effort to communicate. In fact, they are speaking to a very small number of very well-defined and organized interests who spend a good deal of time and effort trying to get their attention. Most citizens are quite distant from this kind of communication and know nothing about it.

"It's Hard to Tell …"

"what we're using our performance indicators for," the sentence continues.

This kind of apparently benign estimation, accompanied by a thoughtful moment of silence, speaks volumes about its maker.

How can it be hard to tell if performance information is being used? Is the speaker not a user? Not involved? Not the leader?

Who is responsible? Who makes the decisions?

To some extent, it can be expected that a top political leader will not in fact know the detailed patterns of use within the agency. Agencies are large and complex. They manage hundreds of programs through thousands of people.

But in other aspects, it is hard to understand. If management is important, and performance is important to management, and performance information is important to management, then top leaders will know exactly how it is being used—at least priority management areas.

That a remark as seemingly casual and distant as "it's hard to tell" can be comfortably made seems to suggest that the only place where performance information could be used is "somewhere over there."

If the remark is a prelude to some thoughtful reflection on why managers do and don't take to using performance measures, it might have some welcome legitimacy.

But it is often made in a casual and dismissive way, as if to say, "I don't know too much about that," or "Not a lot of instances of use have come to my attention."

In any case, it raises the fundamental issue of who is leading. Is the leader the leader? What does leadership mean?

At the least, this kind of attitude conveys a very weak sense of commitment, urgency, or priority on the part of the person making it.

Jaded is the word that comes to mind. *Noncommittal* is another.

Recommended Responses

1. In today's world, where performance information is an integral part of an emerging economic climate in which effectiveness and efficiency are at the heart of competition, a casual attitude toward the use of performance information almost guarantees a noncompetitive result. Performance information is not a nice option. It is a fundamental necessity. One way to assure that it receives priority attention is to ask each program manager to prepare an annual plan of use. Such a plan could be very brief but should include a statement about the expected use of priority performance measures.

2. It would not be a bad idea to prepare an annual report on the use of performance information. Such a report would not have

to document a one-to-one correspondence between each performance measure and a given decision. Few decisions are made on the basis of performance information alone. But documenting the factors taken into account when a decision is made would have the effect of educating managers and staff on the many ways in which performance (or any other) information is used.

"OMB Is Using the PART"

This is true, although probably not in the way intended.

The intent is to suggest that the Program Assessment Rating Tool process is taking the place of the Results Act.

At higher levels in departments and agencies and among those less familiar with the PART process, GPRA requirements, and what is happening between the two in the current context, it may appear that the PART has replaced GPRA and, therefore, performance measures are no long either required or being emphasized.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

GPRA is law. The PART cannot substitute for law.

And even if the PART could substitute for GPRA, its requirements in relation to performance measures are *more,* not *less,* forceful than those in GPRA.

GPRA requires performance measures as a matter of law. The PART requires performance measures to satisfy the budget process. In other words, if you want money, you need measures.

This is a crude formulation, and no one at OMB would agree to it. But, clearly, OMB is using the PART/budget process to drive performance measurement deep into management processes.

As a part of the PART review, an agency's performance measures are scrutinized and assessed. OMB may find them acceptable or unacceptable. This judgment is recorded in a short report that is issued following each PART analysis.

Moreover, an agency's budget—which under the PART process must include performance measures—becomes that agency's performance plan.

A recent GAO report on the PART process makes the point that the current OMB process is substituting a narrower budget framework (the PART) for a more strategic planning framework (GPRA).

But that is the process today.

Political appointees need to know the law. It is not acceptable public service for a political appointee to ignore the law in furtherance of a politically determined management priority, especially when that politically determined management priority has not been subjected to the scrutiny of national debate.

Recommended Responses
1. Public servants in cognizant management positions, whether career or noncareer, have the same responsibility to execute the law. Those responsible for agency fulfillment of PART and GPRA requirements should fully understand the legal

requirements of the latter. GPRA is the law. PART is an OMB management initiative. It is entirely possible to satisfy PART objectives while at the same time carrying out the legal responsibilities mandated by the Results Act.

2. In clarifying their understanding of the relationship between the PART and GPRA, all who are connected with both should understand that the PART is a budget activity while GPRA has a broader strategic purpose. Therefore, one cannot substitute completely for the other. Each serves a distinct purpose. They need to be maintained as separate documents. They are closely—even intimately—related, but they cannot be the same. Strategy should drive the budget, not vice versa.

"I Never Have What I Need"

This is a remark often made by political leaders and rarely responded to effectively by career civil servants.

In part, this is because the kind of information most urgently needed by political appointees frequently has to do with some current emergency or priority issue that falls outside of the normal management or performance information systems of the agency.

In part, as well, it is because career civil servants—and the information systems they manage—don't focus on these kinds of issues.

Careerists tend to have a longer-range, systems view. They see the application of resources to information systems as a long-term investment. They look back and remember what they consider to be inefficient redirections of long-term system improvements to meet short-term needs, and they look ahead to political leaders yet to come with additional needs.

Their feelings may arise from impelling circumstances, and their intent may be good. But, by and large, they do not give sufficient priority and attention to the short-term information needs of their top leaders.

There is no reason, except lack of will and imagination, for top political leaders not to have a good bit of the information they need, even in circumstances that cannot be fully anticipated. Resource limitations may dictate spending, but they do not curtail the imagination or totally eliminate the capacity.

Some things can and should be anticipated. Political leaders often want information about program funding and activities in congressional districts or certain neighborhoods. Much of the information available on federal funding is available for states, cities, counties, and tribes. But there is no reason why methods cannot be at the ready to estimate funding in other types of jurisdictions. The counter argument is that the government could not run if each party redesigned its information systems by changing the units in which data is collected. True enough. But this is carrying the point to an extreme. There are many things that can be done short of completely redesigning a given system that can help to provide the needed information.

And there are many other contexts in which top political leaders need information that is not tied to congressional districts and which present different kinds of problems: a fire devastates a public housing project, making the evening news, and information is needed about damages and plans for repairing it; a hurricane sweeps up the East Coast, leveling thousands of homes, and questions need to be answered about the effectiveness of remedial aid.

These are performance issues. There may be no cost-effective way to design performance measures to anticipate these kinds of circumstances, but there is no reason why some of the resources assigned to performance measurement cannot be set aside to handle such unanticipated information needs.

It is an accepted tenet of performance-based management that no performance indicator should appear without an accompanying contextual statement providing necessary explanatory information. In other words, context is important. And if it is important in routine performance management, then surely it is appropriate in emergency performance management, and so is fully worthy of attention. In fact, one can argue that there is a continuum of contextual information from routine measurement processes, where a minimum of contextual information is needed, through to non-routine measurement processes, where the performance information needed is almost completely contextual.

Recommended Responses
1. Establish a specific staff capacity or function to handle ad hoc needs for performance information. There are a variety of non-routine situations that require performance information, and they should be recognized as legitimate and provided for. Something should be done. Leaving a cabinet secretary or an assistant secretary too alone, as it sometimes seems, to handle urgent crises, knowing full well that such crises will develop, without making some provision for handling them is just bad public service. Some forethought and effort need to be put into the question of how to satisfy ad hoc performance information needs.

2. Develop specific protocols (methodolo-
    gies) for adapting information in existing
    information systems to urgent needs as
    well as for collecting new information
    based on samples in very short time peri-
    ods. These should be in place and ready
    for emergency needs. Creativity can help.
    For example, most agencies have field
    offices around the country. Samples could
    be predrawn for each field office for each
    program, and contacts or respondents
    could be prearranged so that when infor-
    mation is needed, it can be gathered
    quickly.

"My People Know What I Want"

Very good, if true.

Are you sure?

Who are you thinking of? Your fellow appointees, especially those closest to you?

And why not? You all work for the same president. All came in on the same nickel. All will leave at the same time. All have the same scorecard.

Or, do you?

The general pattern is for top appointees to come in swearing fealty to the boss in the White House but gradually slipping over into at least a partial advocacy position for the groups with a vested interest in the programs of their department. It's only natural. Politics and policies come up against the real world, and there's give and take.

But if you do it, they do it—and the implication of that is that no one under you or around you is totally aligned with your priorities.

Another factor to consider is the very large number of people in your department who actually deliver services where the rubber meets the road—in field offices in local settings all over the country, very distant from you. Experience suggests that for these people—the majority of whom work for you—the coming and going of political administrations (including your own arrival and departure)—

have very little impact or meaning. Many are not able to articulate the president's priorities, let alone your own.

It is very easy to forget how large the government is, how hard it is to communicate—let alone effectuate—policies and priorities; and how short a span of time each administration has to pursue its goals.

Performance goals and measures can be a very effective way to communicate your priorities, deploy your resources, and pursue your goals.

It has been said with much truth that what gets measured gets done. Declare a goal and measure, and you have effectively turned on a bright spotlight illuminating all that goes on in your area of interest.

Assuming that your people know what you want and that you have things under control because you are the leader is a very weak reed on which to lean.

Recommended Responses

1. Use some portion of the effort you devote to performance-based management, as required by GPRA and related performance-based administration initiatives, to communicate your top priority interests throughout your organization. Use whatever devices you can afford to spread the message: videotaped speeches by you, videotaped conferences, printed brochures and guidebooks, personal appearances and speeches.

2. Set up a hot line directly to you that employees can use on an anonymous basis to report issues needing to be addressed or to communicate new ideas for improvement. This may be among the most valuable things you can do to achieve your priorities. Much talent and expertise reside in the mid and lower reaches of your organization, and especially outside the beltway. Open up a channel, and you will be able to tap into it. The one inviolable rule is that the channel has to be confidential. The confidentiality of participants must be protected.

"I Already Know …"

"what I need to know"—is the surprising reaction of some leaders when asked whether they have or rely on performance information, indicators, or measures.

This is an extreme expression of the view that the major job of political leaders is to deal with politics and policy.

According to this view, neither requires great expertise in program operations, including information and analysis relating to program performance.

The custodial functions of public servants, political or career, are simply not taken into account.

To some, it may seem hard to imagine that appointed leaders in high places could see their responsibilities in such narrowly political (and often narrowly partisan) terms.

But for those career public servants who have made public service their profession, this kind of approach is more prevalent than one would expect.

For some, a political appointment is a very, very big step up—from a small position to a big one, from a small town to Washington, from a smaller salary to a larger one, from a place far removed from the corridors of power to the nation's capital. But not for everyone. At the highest levels, those who accept political appointments are frequently giving up substantial executive positions, accepting far lower salaries, and turning their backs on large investment portfolios. Truly, these people make an enormous sacrifice in coming to Washington.

But as one goes down from the top through successive layers of appointees, it is often clear that this situation is reversed.

It is undeniable that for some individuals a political appointment is the capstone of a long career or the cornerstone of a younger one.

The seasoning process for executive talent is no different in the public sector than it is in the private sector. Among other things, a career separates out those who will move higher from those who will not.

This sorting-out process is completely normal. Over the long term of a career cohort, narrower views tend to give way to a broader one, lower to higher, and so on.

But the process itself does have consequences, and they are important—whenever narrower views prevail.

Political appointees, especially younger or less senior ones, would do well to remember that life is, among other things, a report card. There's one on each of us. It tends to be known by our associates. And over the course of a career, it is surprising how the people we meet, even in peripheral circumstances, tend to come in and out of our lives.

You don't come to Washington and leave with a diploma. You come and leave with a record. And that record has an effect on whether you come back again, as well as on successive career steps in the private sector.

Recommended Responses:

1. Honor the public service and respect public servants. Public service is an honor, and it should be honored by every public servant. One is not in Washington only as a faithful member of a political party but as an American citizen acting in trust for all other citizens. There is no higher secular activity than to serve on behalf of one's neighbors.

2. Incoming political appointees should read several good biographies of outstanding public servants, people whose lives have made a difference. Not only will this elevate thought, but it will likely sober it as well, for the path to distinction in almost every endeavor, it seems, is 80 percent perspiration, 10 percent inspiration, and 10 percent luck. Don't get caught counting on luck alone.

Communicating Performance Information

A strange transformation occurs after an election, when new political leaders take office.

During the election, the out party is outraged at any lack of disclosure evidenced by the party in office. Every undisclosed detail is fervently seized upon as evidence of ill intent, bad management, or worse.

Disclosure becomes an end in itself, and an almost impossible retrospective standard is established.

Once in office, the incoming administration will rapidly lose interest in this issue and will probably be no better than the last in communicating to the public.

All this is known and expected.

Less well known is that once they are in office, political administrations of both parties do not think very much about "citizens"—about what they should know, about what our democratic political system requires them

to know, about communicating information about "performance." They think mainly about carrying out their agenda, successfully negotiating the midterm congressional elections, and preparing the way for a second term.

Something worse happens: They abstract citizens into a broad, amorphous group whose opinions and views need to be managed.

Rarely is there a recognition that there is a responsibility inherent in our political system to fairly, accurately, and promptly communicate to citizens about the administration's performance in relation to the management of their tax dollars.

A higher standard is needed.

"The Public Isn't Interested"

How do you know?

Whom have you talked to lately from "the public"?

In fact, whom have you talked to anywhere about performance information?

Likely, no one from "the public" and maybe no one at all.

To say that the public is not interested in performance information is a little disingenuous. Should they be? What are you there for? Aren't they counting on you?

Let's put the question a little differently.

Is the public interested in performance? I think they are. It's their money we're spending. Do they want to know all of the performance information about government programs? Probably not. Do they want it when they are interested in a particular program? Almost certainly. Do they want to know performance is being watched closely by you and that all the performance information necessary to track the expenditure of public dollars is available and being watched by you? You bet.

The point is that the public, like you and your agency, is learning its way toward performance-based management. There is a set of concepts to be learned, a new vocabulary, and new methods.

But to reduce the issue to its core: Who among the public, what individual citizen, does not want his or her tax dollars spent with due diligence? What citizen would want less than your best effort in managing public resources?

Part of your job in the public service is to communicate what you do. This may require some translation. Few outside of government are experts in its operation and vocabulary. And there is no reason why they should be.

It is your specific responsibility in the public service to act on their behalf, to do what they would want you to do if they were here to do it. It isn't you versus them, you knowledgeable people on the inside versus them out there.

Most people have a high degree of interest in their money and what is done with it, and this is especially true in regard to taxes. Many people work hard for the dollars they give to their government. They want to know that you are working just as hard to spend them wisely.

Recommended Responses
1. Develop a communications strategy designed specifically to communicate to the public. Given likely resource limitations, this will probably mean selecting a limited number of high-priority areas and targeting specific subgroups of citizens. Each program and activity exists within a particular social and economic context.

Take some initial steps to see what is most effective. Consider both print and video.

2. Take some portion of your speech-making agenda and target it specifically to the issue of communicating results about a priority program or activity to a specific group of citizens. Use this experience to learn how to use performance information. Apply this experience to subsequent communication activities. Eventually, this will cohere into a useful body of information on communicating to the public, or more properly to different publics.

"It's Not Important …"

"enough for me to deal with"—is sometimes the response to a question about communicating program activity.

And sometimes the response seems reasonable.

When you're waiting in the outer office of a cabinet secretary while people come and go, some speaking to his or her top administrative assistant, it's easy to sense that the secretary is a very important person. Actually being in the secretary's office, with its lush carpeting, opulent couches and chairs, polished dark-wood paneling, and windows with panoramic views of Washington, you sense that a cabinet secretary is a very high level and important person.

In this setting, the secretary does not seem to be someone who can be expected to be involved in the details of communicating progress in the implementation of performance-based management.

Until we remember that this person was appointed as a part of a political administration whose leader is elected every four years by all the citizens to serve and advance their interests, among which is the wise and prudent use of public funds.

Performance-based management has at its core a focus on services, costs, and quality.

Political appointees have no more fundamental responsibility than to manage the resources entrusted to their care in a responsible and *transparent* manner.

The very best performance management system, one with perfect output and outcome indicators and accurate cost information, has only done half of its job if the information it yields is not effectively communicated to the public.

Good management is half the job; good communication is the other half.

There's a specific reason why this is deeply rooted in our system of government.

We are very proud of the fact that we are a democracy. But a democracy cannot function without information. Citizens cannot wisely vote if they are not well informed.

The political executive who faithfully and competently manages his agency's programs but does not communicate effectively to citizens is not adhering to the highest standards of public service.

Recommended Responses

1. A good first step for a cabinet secretary would be to indicate to all subordinate appointees that communication relative to performance is a priority. This would send a clear signal throughout the agency and begin to provide incentives to the system. While it might be useful to set aside additional resources for this purpose, it is not essential. There are many existing processes, activities, events, and products in every agency that could be utilized. These include training sessions, conference workshops, congressional hearings, speeches, mandated local citizen meetings, and so on. The point is that a signal can be given.

2. All cabinet secretaries have a number of priorities assigned to them by the president and several of their own. In regard to these priorities, performance information should be communicated to citizens in an exemplary fashion. It is a requirement that is higher than loyalty to party; it is a requirement to country. This includes, importantly, reporting both information that shows the agency at its best as well as information that shows room for improvement.

"Our Public/Congressional Relations People Do That"

If they do, you're on the wrong track.

Public relations and congressional relations staff facilitate communication and polish images; they do not (or should not) be the primary message developers.

The substance of what you and your agency do is in your hands and yours alone.

There is a direct line of accountability from you to your top political and career managers. That same line extends outward, through you to the public.

PR and congressional relations staff can help you to deliver the message, but only you can decide its most important content.

For those issues that are of the highest priority to the president and to you, the responsibility for the message and its delivery is yours.

Look at it this way: These functions are not as directly accountable in the political process as you and your subordinate appointees. If you were a citizen, would you want to hear from the highest-level cognizant leader or from the press corps?

This is a substantive management responsibility, not an exercise in political image building.

Many things that you are called on to do as a political appointee are entirely and understandably political in nature.

But the reporting of factual elements relative to the progress of programs and services funded by public tax dollars is not one of them.

Even if the news is bad or counter to the policies of the president, you have an obligation to communicate the essential information fairly and honestly, and, importantly, to place your own personal integrity on the line by taking center stage on the most important issues.

It comes with the territory. You hold a high office, and it requires high standards.

Recommended Responses

1. It seems that few appointees spend much time thinking about the distinction between their political and nonpolitical responsibilities. There are differences. One party can favor a certain type of housing program for poor people. The party's general position is known during a political campaign, and citizens respond with their votes. But progress reports on that approach need to be empirical, not political. Honesty, fairness, and good judgment on behalf of the public interest are the standards for both parties. Appointees should make this clear to their PR and congressional relations functions, and assume direct responsibility for communicating progress against goals for their most important activities.

2. An interesting approach would be to invite key "publics"—interest groups, program beneficiaries, and the press—into the agency on a regular basis for in-depth briefings. Top-level political and career civil servants could be present to answer questions. The meetings could be videotaped and made available for distribution. Of course, briefings are a fairly routine occurrence in Washington. But they have a "staged" quality and are often quite formal. The approach envisioned here would be characterized by informality. These briefings would place the citizen, rather than the agency, at the helm, allowing the meeting to go wherever it might. Additional agency staff could be called in to answer questions as needed.

"The White House Does That"

There is a widespread tendency on the part of political appointees (actually anyone who has not been around long enough to know differently) to assume that the president and his staff are orchestrating much more than they do.

Partly, this is a natural outgrowth of the enormous sense of mission many bring with them, especially in relation to a first-time appointment. There's a boost to the ego as one tells one's colleagues: "I have a presidential appointment. I'm going to be deputy assistant secretary at…." The same rush of excitement that elevates the new deputy assistant secretary elevates the president even higher.

Partly, it is a sense of responsibility, respect, and/or awe so wide and deep that it imagines an enormous presidential staff, highly organized, setting the nation's course with the precision of a machine—indeed, the largest, most successful such machine on the planet.

And, partly, it is a fear of making a mistake, losing face, or embarrassing the administration.

In practice, the Office of the President consists of a relatively small group of people who manage the president's time in minutes and seconds.

A cabinet officer in good standing and in the spotlight for some reason or other may have only minutes, maybe 15 or 20, with the president, and that no more than several times a month.

The point is that it can be a mistake to simply assume that the White House knows, understands, and is taking action—on anything. And in this the government is no different from the private sector. It would be a mistake to make this assumption in any large organization, period.

The White House is, at one level, a relatively small group of people that operates at a distance far removed from the front lines of agency activities. The same is true within agencies. Cabinet secretaries, simply by virtue of their high position, operate at quite a distance from the front lines.

The point is: Don't assume there is intelligent life above you. There may be. You should be on the lookout for it. You should look for and follow a clearly set direction.

But don't assume the White House does that.

Recommended Responses

1. When in doubt, prepare to act. If it's important, get ready to do it. Look around. Ask around. Call someone at OMB if you are in doubt. But don't fail to act or prepare to act under the assumption that the Office of the President will or is likely to act.

2. It wouldn't be a bad idea to use some part of your airtime with OMB or the president to outline your communication plan for the president's and your top priority activities. Both OMB and the Executive Office are always looking for good ways to communicate what the administration is doing. There may be some sensitivity to communicating information that concerns problems, but it can be argued that getting out in front of a potential problem is better than getting caught behind it. In the first instance, you have some ability to control the message; in the second, almost none.

"We Produce Tons of Reports"

This is one of the most commonly heard remarks from political appointees, especially from those for whom such an appointment represents an initial contact with official Washington.

It's often followed by one of these statements:

- "Who reads these things?"

- "These reports are useless."

- "How much do they cost?"

- "Who wrote this thing?"

- "These reports are deadly."

- "What a waste!"

- "Why do we do these things?"

And other such comments, which an initial response may be: "True enough. Many are done poorly."

But the question is why should they be done at all, and the answer to that very important question leads in an entirely different direction.

There are two answers: (1) because they are required by law, and public servants are sworn to faithfully carry out the law, and (2) because it's the right thing to do, as required by our democratic political system.

Almost every major piece of legislation—in other words, almost every program and ser- vice—requires the executive branch agency responsible for the expenditure and manage-

ment of funds to provide an annual (or other similar) report to the Congress on what it has done with the money.

Without a regular flow of information, our political system could not work. A democratic political system requires a regular flow of information from citizens to their government and from government to citizens.

That many of these reports are not done well is, sadly, often true. But it is a sorry, sorry excuse for continuing the tradition.

Many are deadly, mechanical recitations of national aggregate statistics, meaningful to almost no one. Frequently, this is not the fault of the authors, who are often given little direction, meager resources, and no priority.

Annual reports required by law should be produced with the same high sense of respon- sibility given to other legal requirements, or the law itself and the citizens it protects are demeaned.

Recommended Responses

1. Conduct an agencywide review of annual reporting requirements. Assess the quality of past reports in relation to their intended purpose. Take into account the staff, financial, and other resources available to produce and disseminate the reports. Come up with a plan to do a better job. Probably it will be necessary to prioritize

what can be done. Probably resources will be limited. Do something to make things better. Doing nothing is not an acceptable alternative.

2. Focus on one or a small number of reports related to the president's priorities and yours. Focus your personal attention on these. Try to do something that others can emulate. Talk with key stakeholders, including OMB, Congress, interest groups, and citizens. Consider replacing or sup- plementing the printed report with other communication strategies such as online websites, perhaps including interactive elements. Start on a path of experimenta- tion to see what seems to do the best job.

"We Don't Have the Resources"

Of all the reactions expressed in regard to a query about communicating performance information, this may be one of the most common, untrue, and fatal to effective public service.

There is a certain offhandedness about the way this statement is made.

When, for example, do we ever hear anyone say that he has all the resources he needs? When—I can't recall ever hearing this in a 30-year public service career—do we ever hear anyone say that she has "enough" resources? Or "what is needed to do the job"?

Is it not part of being a smart player to always guard against a possible decrease in funding, to always lay the groundwork for a budget increase, and throughout to portray your activity, program, office, or agency as struggling mightily against heavy odds to delivery important services?

Turning the tables a bit, how often do we hear this comment when the issue is a very high-priority activity? Who wants to be seen as a complainer when the president or a cabinet secretary just wants it done?

The point is that it's easy to say "resources are scarce." The problem is that it's almost always true for almost everything.

And in regard to communicating information about program progress, management initiatives, or service delivery, these words have an especially hollow sound because the legisla-

tion and appropriation for many programs provides for an annual report to Congress.

The truth is that neither political nor career public servants give much attention to these requirements. Typically, the agency stays in touch with its appropriations committee, keeping it supplied with whatever information it asks for during the year, and the production of annual reports is a low-priority chore.

A career civil servant assigned to produce an annual report for a non-controversial program in its 10th year of operation can be sure his career is on the skids.

To be sure, more interest is paid to these reports in the early years of new programs or initiatives or when there is some problem or crisis. Otherwise, few care.

The point is that this is a funding source for communicating to the public on performance issues.

Recommended Responses

1. To make the point in a big way, ask someone to list all of the annual reporting requirements and estimate the staff and other costs associated with their production and distribution. It is likely that the magnitude of the resources devoted to this seemingly innocuous task will be compelling. By itself, this will likely alert everyone that the task has to be taken seriously.

2. Ask subordinate bureau and program managers to come up with a communications plan that uses available resources in the most effective way to report fundamental performance information about costs and results to every citizen. The same report can also be used to communicate information on the administration's priority initiatives. *But its first and fundamental obligation is to provide an accurate and faithful accounting for the management of public resources.*

"It's Not That Important"

"It's just not a priority." "I have a lot of things to do." "We do so many things." Or words to this effect.

Writing reports. It seems so innocuous. So inconsequential. So unexciting. To both political and career public servants.

Here are 10 reasons why it needs to be done, and well:

1. Public servants must inform citizens.

2. Public servants must inform citizens.

3. Public servants must inform citizens.

4. Public servants must inform citizens.

5. Public servants must inform citizens.

6. Public servants must inform citizens.

7. Public servants must inform citizens.

8. Public servants must inform citizens.

9. Public servants must inform citizens.

10. Public servants must inform citizens.

Our system of government cannot work effectively unless there is a flow of information from citizens to public servants and from public servants to citizens.

Citizens express their wishes; public servants carry them out.

The system can't work without effective two-way communication.

It helps to remember that public servants are (1) paid by and responsible to citizens, and (2) entrusted with and responsible for the effective management of citizen dollars.

We don't half remember this enough—political and career public servants.

We tend to abstract what we do until we lose sight of our neighbors and friends, no longer seeing them as individuals and citizens, but as "beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries," "eligibles and non-eligibles," "low- or low-to-moderate-income people," and so on.

It's easy to do. No one intends any disrespect.

But we forget.

We need to remember.

Recommended Responses

1. Pick a neighborhood, county, city, or beneficiary group and make it your business to really understand its problems and needs and the way your agency addresses both. It may be a revealing experience with implications far beyond the small ones you have come to know. The point is to put a face on the citizens you serve. It will help you with every other thing you do.

2. Pick a small sample of program beneficiaries and follow them closely. Find out all you can from your program records. Call them directly to express interest and learn more. Call them periodically to see if you can build a useful dialogue. It may be necessary to inform whoever you call that the call is "on the record" and to keep a transcript of the call. But just as a personal visit on the part of a top executive to the desk of a lower-echelon employee can inject a sense of interest and concern, so a call to a program participant or beneficiary can convey a sense of commitment and responsibility. Both are easy to do and can pay dividends. The same can be said of visits to service delivery sites and direct meetings with citizens.

A B O U T   T H E   A U T H O R

Chris Wye served as Director of the Center for Improving Government Performance at the National Academy of Public Administration from 1994 until 2003. The Center provides assistance to government agencies on improving management processes using the techniques of performance-based management, including strategic planning, performance measurement, program evaluation, performance-based budgeting, and strategic management.

Wye also was the Director of the Performance Consortium, an organization of 30 federal agency functions that have come together under the Academy's leadership to provide a program of peer-to-peer dialogue, forums, workshops, and conferences to support the exchange of helpful practices related to performance-based management.

Prior to his work with the Academy, Wye spent 20 years in the federal government, directing policy analysis, program evaluation, and program monitoring functions. He has written and published widely on practical, low-cost techniques for improving government performance.

Wye graduated from Parsons College with a B.A. in 1966, and from Kent State University with an M.A. in 1967 and a Ph.D. in 1974.

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