



TAKEAWAYS

- › Traditional tools to impact today and tomorrow's future fiscal challenges are not easily accessible or readily available.
- › Conventional approaches to driving innovation within an organization won't work in today's demand for speed, practicality, and results.
- › R.A.P.I.D. Innovation is a five-step repeatable process designed to equip your workforce members with a proven approach to generating contemporary innovative solutions.



“Every act of creation is first an act of destruction.”

—PABLO PICASSO

Conventional wisdom has been summarily discarded during these unprecedented times. Government leaders accustomed to relying on traditional tools—increasing taxes while cutting expenses, for example—to remedy temporary financial blips have experienced a sobering realization that the current climate in most places is not receptive to raising taxes. Plus, reducing expenses can stretch a dollar only so far.

Other solutions to address rising resident demands for services, including adding more members to the government workforce along with purchasing new and improved equipment, are relics from a bygone era.

How can government leaders counter such trends? First, we must arrive at the realization that outside-the-box thinking is not even an option because there is *no box!* This daunting but true proposition can unhinge even the most seasoned manager.

Government administrators must escape the gravitational pull of bureaucracy—the resynthesizing of past solutions to try to affect current and future problems. Although former options are not as readily available as they once were, using them would not generate nearly the impact it once did. Their influence has waned. The notion that the only way public services can be improved is by increasing the size of the workforce is a myth that must be overcome.

That belief assumes that every employee is working at an optimum level, which isn't the situation. Too much emphasis has been placed on well-written job descriptions as the primary predictor of employee effectiveness. Many factors influence employee productivity, including policies and procedures, management practices, performance

By Patrick Ibarra

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BOX

Uncertain Times Demand
R.A.P.I.D. Innovation

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measures, and organizational structures. When these are well synchronized, an organization's performance improves.

Change, Money, and Time

Government leaders must embrace the onset of rampant ambiguity and become fluent in change management. As Ben Franklin wrote in 1789, "in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." An ability by government leaders to stay focused on today's business while building tomorrow's business is essential to leading a community and a workforce effectively and to managing budgets prudently. If managers can execute this well, their communities will emerge from this financial crisis more successful and better prepared for whatever the future holds.

Money is not your agency's most precious resource today. Time is. Consider that some employees in your organization are working right now to generate reports that no one reads! When leaders redirect the time and efforts of employees to provide more value-added services, better outcomes will be realized.

What employees are spending their time on—providing which services to whom and at what level—should be the focus of your efforts to optimize resources. The stronger the alignment between employee time and value-added services translates to a more effective organization and the faster the accrual of social capital needed to enrich the quality of life.

Financial resources ebb and flow, but paradoxically time stands still while moving more quickly than in the past. Organizational leaders who can, with a laserlike focus, redirect the time of their workforce will ensure quality services are being provided.

Innovative Leaders

How can this be accomplished without the box used in the past? Remember that as much as inside-the-box thinking worked, it also became a straitjacket preventing the introduction of new ideas and potential new solutions. So, after rejecting the conventional wisdom that offered comfortable solutions and accepting the fact that ambiguity prevails, what should government leaders pursue to leverage these forces for change?

Great question! The optimal solution is R.A.P.I.D. Innovation. R.A.P.I.D. arrives at the convergence of two emerging maxims. Playing it safe is no longer playing it smart, and old mental models won't work in today's times. Based on extensive research, I developed R.A.P.I.D., a bold, forward-thinking, powerful, practical, and productive mechanism designed to generate, identify, select, implement, and evaluate contemporary innovative solutions.

R.A.P.I.D. is an acronym for:

Ramp up the idea generator.

Analyze the impact.

Prepare.

Implement.

Do it again.

R.A.P.I.D. features a five-step approach that organizational leaders can repeat over and over again. No additional funds are needed to purchase a software program because R.A.P.I.D. Innovation is essentially a fresh, problem-solving tool designed to generate immediate dividends all through the directed efforts of your workforce. Waiting for serendipity to occur with innovative solutions as the outcome is entirely too random and

unreliable—and exceedingly risky in today's climate.

Instead, leaders need an approach that's sound and designed to produce innovative solutions intentionally, not by chance. Surveys have shown that most employee suggestion box programs rarely work, and, even with the best intentions, employee task forces convened to focus on innovation lose their energy after the initial launch. R.A.P.I.D. is designed to embed innovation within the very fabric of your organization—your workplace and your workforce.

The premise of R.A.P.I.D. is that the source for innovative ideas necessary to positively impact today's public policy issues confronting governments resides in the minds of existing elected and appointed officials along with members of the workforce. We must unlock the straitjacket and unleash leaders and their employees to engage in real talk about real change and introduce an innovative approach that disrupts the status quo thinking of the "we've always done it that way" refrain.

This is a refrain that is too often repeated inside government organizations everywhere. A R.A.P.I.D. approach is all about smart risk taking that is crucial to addressing today's extraordinary challenges.

Managers have an abundance of opportunities to make radical changes. To do so successfully, they need appropriate levels of courage and confidence that are fundamental to driving successful change as well as tools to help them.

Leaders today must be effective catalysts and translate the forces for change into better local government. They recognize that "doing things different and doing different things" is a prerequisite for innovating and creating a climate that can permeate the traditional risk-averse culture that limits the progressive thinking desperately needed today.

Innovative leaders realize that slashing budgets as a cutback measure is the equivalent of a person who decides to eat less. That person may lose weight,

but without choosing foods carefully that person's health won't necessarily improve. Innovators contend that traditional innovation gives way to duplication and makes an organization less distinctive. These leaders recognize their government organizations have a host of competitors in the service delivery business and so adopt a next-practice approach over the best-practice approach.

An innovator understands that an organization needs talented people more than talented people need an organization. Public service is about having a positive impact on the world around us, where every day matters. Skilled, passionate people don't simply want jobs; they want to work for causes. Local government is, at its core, a cause, and that cause forges an emotional connection with residents to enable government to improve quality of life.

Innovators foster a work environment so dynamic that most employees

would be hard-pressed to find a similar environment somewhere else. Even though hiring freezes have become all too common, retaining top-flight talent is more crucial today than ever, especially when roles and responsibilities have expanded with little to no increase in compensation.

Innovative leaders think differently about the business of continuous improvement and invariably talk about it differently as well. Conversations are the oxygen of priorities, and if organizations truly want to adopt and *practice* more innovative approaches, they begin by inserting new words into daily discussions and steering people into new ways of thinking.


Finally, innovative leaders embrace originality as the litmus test for better government and want employees to be idea entrepreneurs and to flourish in a work environment that provides them room to maneuver. Ultimately, innova-

tors understand that we're limited only by our imaginations as we solve today's unprecedented challenges. **PM**



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