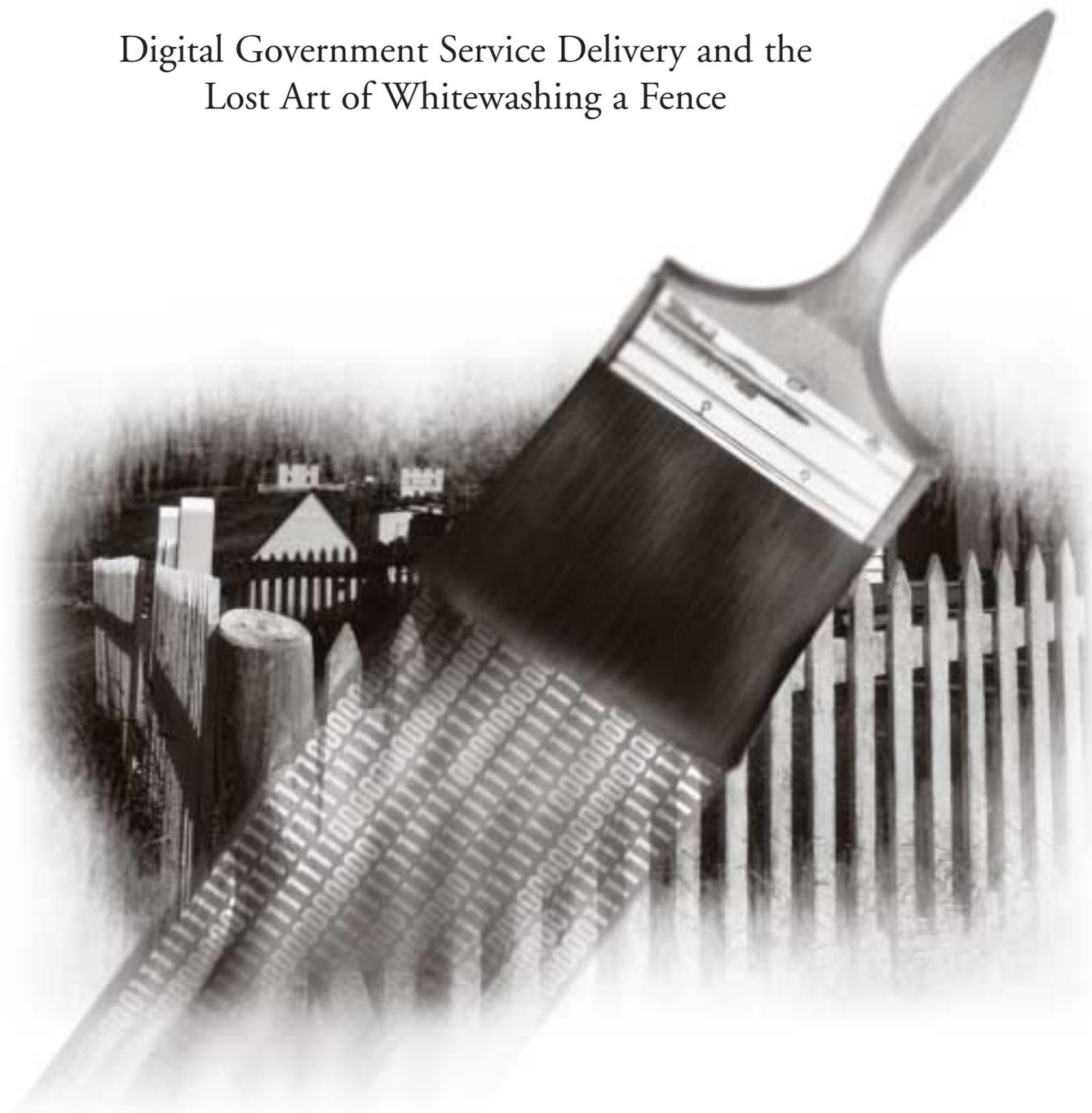


The Sawyer Principles

Digital Government Service Delivery and the
Lost Art of Whitewashing a Fence



A STRATEGY PAPER WITH INSIGHT FROM THE CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

© 2005, CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

This white paper draws on the work by Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Fiction, 1876, 229 pages) which, to the best of our knowledge, falls under the public domain guidelines of copyright law in the United States and elsewhere. Times and standards have changed since it was published and we have made no attempt to update the story. The narrative in the original work may contain certain speech patterns and linguistic distinctives that were much more widely accepted in their day. No offence is intended to contemporary audiences for such language use.

The Sawyer Principles

Digital Government Service Delivery and the
Lost Art of Whitewashing a Fence



Executive Summary -

WORK THAT "SUITS" AND A NEW MODEL OF COLLABORATION

*"What do you call work?"
"Why, ain't that work?"
"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't.
All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."*

Whitewashing the Fence

From Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, Chapter Two, 1876

The work that suits government is a reflection of public policy priorities, external socio-economic conditions, and — as Tom Sawyer would remind us — the circumstances at a particular place and time.

Identifying the work that suits government at this moment in history calls on public-sector leaders to look beyond long-held assumptions — even those which have served government well for decades — and consider new, seemingly novel or unorthodox behaviors that enable government to meet its responsibilities to the people it serves.

During the opening decade of the new century, governments faced new challenges and public demand to

address them including but not limited to threats to public safety and security from terrorism, to public health from new or mutant viruses, and to the U.S. economy from the effects of globalization and the approaching wave of aging baby boomers with its attendant demand on public services.

These difficult public policy issues are set against a backdrop of technological change that brings with it the promise of greater efficiencies in service delivery and more effective civic engagement through digital government.

In attempting to reconcile infinite demand with finite public resources, it is clear that there is more work than can be reasonably done by government alone. The question is, which work is best done by government? And which work is appropriately done by third parties? As importantly, how are those decisions made? And by whom?

There is anecdotal evidence from coast to coast of public-sector leaders who, in the face of daunting challenges and

The Sawyer Principles

apparently few resources, have sighed that this was a job for Tom Sawyer. Such whimsy is typically met with knowing grins. Perhaps it was the shared memory of Mark Twain's charming American classic — or perhaps a shared, intuitive understanding that, if a task was going to be done at all, it would require the cleverness of *Tom Sawyer Whitewashes a Fence*.

This white paper, *The Sawyer Principles*, is intended to take these top-of-memory references to the story and explore what it would be like to cast government as Tom Sawyer, who — in a subversively helpful way — makes others covet the difficult work before him and, in so doing, discovers what really suits him best.

While not intended as a substitute for important literature on public policy, organizational change or even the use of technology, *The Sawyer Principles* provides a new starting point for thinking through the often intractable challenges of public service with a fresh perspective on possible models of leadership and collaboration. In fact, *The Sawyer Principles* stand on the shoulders of a body of work on government reform and modernization. For example, David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson's *The Price of Government* surveys the exploits (and the results) of a growing list of modern Tom Sawyers — New York's Rudy Giuliani, Indianapolis' Stephen Goldsmith, Multnomah County's Beverly Stein, and Washington State's Gary Locke — who make the hard work of doing the public's business the work for which others compete.

Anchoring these lessons from Twain's tale is helpful in two ways. The old story provides immediately familiar signposts to readers for an approachable introduction to the ideas of modern reformers. Importantly, Tom Sawyer reminds us that we already know how to confront daunting challenges, allowing us to see that these new formulations

are a restatement or rediscovery of values, principles and instincts that are deeply imbedded in the American psyche. Stephen Goldsmith, who served as mayor of Indianapolis for most of the 1990s and co-author William Eggers trace a long and proud history of what they call *Government by Network*:

Historically governments have collaborated extensively with private firms, associations, and charitable organizations to accomplish public goals and deliver services.... [T]hanks to a variety of factors, including advances in technology and broader changes in the economy and society that favor networked forms of organization, today's networked government trend is both greater in breadth and different in kind than anything seen previously. In particular, governance by network represents the confluence of four influential trends that are altering the shape of public sectors worldwide.

- **Third-party government:** the decades-long increase in using private firms and nonprofit organizations ... to deliver services and fulfill policy goals.
- **Joined-up government:** the increasing tendency for multiple government agencies, sometimes even at multiple levels of government, to join together to provide integrated service.
- **The digital revolution:** the recent technological advances that enable organizations to collaborate in real time with external partners in ways previous not possible.
- **Consumer demand:** increased citizen demand for more control over their own lives and more choices and varieties in their government services, to match the customized service provision technology has spawned in the private sector.¹

¹ Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, *Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004: 9-10.

Enter the Sawyer Principles...

THE SAWYER PRINCIPLES

The Sawyer Principles are rooted in the assumption that, by analogy, government can be (and should be) the clever kid who rallies the community to act in the public interest and in a way that is consistent with the enlightened self interest of the network of contributors. To that end, we offer 10 modest propositions interpolated² from the Mark Twain original and presented here in summary form as *The Sawyer Principles*:

1) Tom on What Government Must Be Good At from the Start: What It Knows and Controls and How Far Its Resources Will Go

Measuring the Far-Reaching Continent of Unwhitewashed Fence and Knowing What It Looks Like When It's Done

2) Tom on the Perils of Isolation: When You Need Friends, It is Too Late to Go Find Them

Coming to Terms with the Multiplying Sorrows of Going It Alone and What Government Cannot Do by Itself

3) Tom on the Work that Suits Government: Leading Because Government is the Only One that Can

Evangelizing the 'Why' of Government by Leveraging Magnificent Inspiration to Innovate through a Hopeless Moment

4) Tom on Achieving Consequential Results: Getting It Right Before Getting It Done

Understanding the Differences Between "What" and "How," Armed With a Bucket of Whitewash and a Long-Handled Brush

5) Tom on Rediscovering the Spirit of Public Service: When Work Becomes Play

Coveting the Play of Difficult Work by Making It Difficult to Attain

6) Tom on the Currency of Collaboration: Building a New Generation of Networked Agents of Government on Behalf of the People They All Serve

Trading Playthings and Skylarking With the Strange Whitewash Fellows of Networked Collaboration

7) Tom on Rethinking the Problem: Getting a Chance to Whitewash a Little

Knowing What Government is Going to Do and What Others Will Do by Putting the Thing in a New Light

8) Tom on Doing Things Differently: When Doing More With Less is Not Enough

Alacrity in a Leader's Heart by Finding the Right Answer at the Right Time

9) Tom on Public Accountability: Being Somebody's Aunt Polly

Professionalizing Public Service and Maintaining Public Trust

10) Tom on Results: From Pale Streaks to Three Coats of Whitewash Thanks to a Good Plan, a Smart Leader and Some Helpful Friends

Realizing Results in Interdependent Government Through Networks of Collaboration

An annotated version of the principles appears below in the main body of the white paper.

The white paper is organized in four main parts:

Part I — The Challenge: Innovating Out of a Tough Spot, reviews government's role in the economy and its relationship to the new digital majority;

Part II – The Principles: Rethinking Roles, annotates the propositions outlined above and extracts lessons from the story of a young boy on a hot day with a big job to do;

Part III – The Model: Rethinking Collaboration, explores the prospect for networked collaboration through the intersection of Sawyer's ingenuity, government's responsibility and digital technology's possibility; and,

Part IV – The Call: Rethinking Leadership, anticipates the next time Sawyer's name is invoked as the last best hope of solution and positions the reader to respond, "I know what Tom would do."

A final note. In the preface to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Writings of Mark Twain, Volume VII*, the author worries, "Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account..." Similarly, the hope here is that its retelling in this context will not be shunned by beleaguered public-sector executives or serious-minded policy analysts. Instead, the hope is to remind them not just of simpler times, but of the spirit of public service that has historically under girded government's responses to the challenges of the day.

²*In 'ter 'po 'la 'ted*: Inserted in, or added to, the original; introduced; foisted in; changed by the insertion of new or spurious matter. (Source: *The FreeDictionary.com*, 2004.)

Part 1: The Challenge

INNOVATING OUT OF A TOUGH SPOT

"I have in general no very exalted opinion of the virtue of paper government."

- Edmund Burke

In 2000, on the eve of the new millennium, Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz joined a chorus of public policy and technology thinkers in calling for a fundamental rethinking of government's roles and responsibilities in a networked world. "Existing rules for evaluating governmental activities need to be updated to reflect the ongoing shift toward a digital economy. Industrial developments at the beginning of the 20th century required major rethinking of the role of government A substantial review is also warranted now."³

Government has a long tradition of declaring national priorities and identifying the resources to meet them, and is no stranger to recruiting the assistance of industry and individuals in meeting those national aims. It acts when it acts best, as Tom Sawyer in convincing others of the enlightened self interest in contributing to realizing larger public goals.

Government now looks at a horizon crisscrossed with old fences in need of refreshing and new fences that have yet to get their first coat of paint. It has also learned hard lessons about which fences are worth the bother, and how best to maintain those that are.

In taking the first step in response to the Stiglitz challenge, it is useful to survey the landscape at the midway point in the first decade of the new century. In the closing decade of the last century, leadership was characterized by making the most of available resources — and the resources were available thanks to 15 years of budgetary expansion in state and local government. In the opening decade of this century, leadership has been characterized by making tough choices from among bad options — a function of a punishing public-sector revenue recession that has taken \$200 billion out of public coffers since it began in 2000.

Beyond a declining bottom line, governing in the new millennium is characterized by:

- Pent-up demand behind the public-sector revenue recession, which is finally beginning to soften;

- Growing recognition of the need to move from fixed to discretionary costs in the delivery of services, which are subject to prioritization by those who steer;

- A digital majority among American households, where fully 72 percent of American households have Internet connectivity (Ipsos-Reid, Dec. 02), half of which are connected by broadband (Nielsen/NetRatings, Sep. 04);

- An engaged civil society that wants (back) in. The 2004 presidential primaries illustrated the nascent power of services such as MeetUp.com — where America's digital majority hooks up online so they can meet up in their local communities to do something real, ranging from rallying for a candidate or fixing the roof of a needy neighbor;

- The in-house expertise and experience of civil service in a demographic transition, and whose workload well exceeds current capacity. In preparing for the mix of capacity and competence needed internally by 21st century government, we need to be attentive to having a comprehensive transition strategy up front, and developing (or strengthening) core competencies in the effective management of relationships across agencies or jurisdictions — and with third parties outside of government; and,

- Of course, the continuing work of commercial interests that have been acting as agents of government for decades in fulfilling public missions remain a part of the mix as well.

With the depleted general fund over-subscribed by a growing list of old obligations and new expectations, governors and legislatures tackled the issue of "inherently governmental functions"⁴ by re-examining the priorities of government in the spending of scarce public resources. In such exercises, everything government does or aspires to do can be sorted into one of six buckets:

- 1) Those things that government was doing and that it alone or UNIQUELY can do, and that it needs to continue doing;
- 2) Those things that government is NOT currently doing, but that it alone or uniquely can do and needed to start doing;
- 3) Those things that government is NOT currently doing and which have been identified as being needed to be done, but for which others outside government are

³Joseph E. Stiglitz, Peter R. Orszag and Jonathan M. Orszag, *The Role of Government in a Digital Age, A Report Commissioned by the Computer and Communications Industry Association, October 2000.*

⁴The term "inherently governmental function" has been shorthand for U.S. policy on government's relationship to the performance of commercial activities in every Administration since President Eisenhower. Codified in OMB Circular A-76, inherently governmental functions are defined negatively but succinctly as "a commercial activity is not a government function." (Source: Circular No. A-76 on *Competitive Sourcing*, Executive Office of the President Office of Management And Budget, Washington, D.C. (Revised 1999).

already performing such functions in the economy today or can readily do so, and for which government absorption or duplication could put continued private production and innovation at risk;

4) Those things that government should not do itself, but it alone can establish. In this role, government sets rules for third parties to do the work and holds them accountable for performance. In so doing, the tactical functions of government are reduced to their component parts,⁵ changed and recombined in ways that they can be done by anyone with proper supervision and trust;

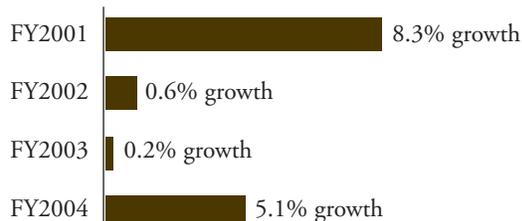
5) Those things that only a person in the direct employ of government can do, including but not limited to making decisions, allocating resources, responding to changed conditions, making new decisions, judging success and failure, earning and holding trust, and those remaining physical tasks to which we can only trust a government employee; and,

6) Those things that government is currently doing, but which others could do if they need to be done at all, and from which government could appropriately withdraw.

The ability to prioritize followed almost three decades of important preparatory work on reinventing, retooling and reengineering government to fulfill existing mandates more efficiently and effectively. [As a practical matter, the test of government's ability to perform a function took a second seat to straight-ahead prioritization that identified those things that government could afford to stop doing, or those functions that need to be done but which government perhaps ought not perform itself for public policy, economic policy, budgetary, or other reasons — creating an opening for third parties, including networks of private-sector and public-sector employees and their unions, and other non-governmental organizations, to work together to fulfill public missions with private-sector discipline.] We find ourselves at a unique moment when the unanswered question about work in the public interest has shifted from “what” to “how.”

The results of the revenue recession effectively created a new baseline for the next growth cycle even as pent-up demand for new spending exerts upward pressure for increased spending and new or expanded programs. Revenue projections in a growing number of states appear to have bottomed and some have begun to track upward again. In fact, after two years of flat-lined revenues, the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) sees a return to noticeable growth in state spending plans this fiscal year, with an estimated 5.1 percent up tick in FY 2004.

STATE REVENUES BY YEAR



Source: NASBO, 2004

Proper public stewardship requires that the release of that pent-up demand, fuelled by refilling public coffers, be guided by both a policy and economic framework with a view to prioritizing investments. Ultimately the objective is to sustain and, as needed, replenish the public treasury in order to “buy results that citizens value at the price they are willing to pay.”⁶ To do otherwise is to risk a flurry of new activity in areas and through means where the public interest may not be well served.

The apparent short-term revenue recovery notwithstanding, Osborne and Hutchinson argue that government has entered an era of permanent financial crisis, characterized by infinite demand for healthcare and finite revenue that cannot keep up. It is worth acknowledging that “permanent” may be a tad hyperbolic in describing anything in the life of a relatively young and dynamic country that is still properly called the American experiment. Still, Osborne and Hutchinson’s plan for preserving vital services bring a renewed results-oriented discipline to doing the public’s business — and spending scarce taxpayer funds. Their model for buying better results for citizens begins with five decision points:

- 1) **Getting a Grip on the Problem:** Is it short- or long-term? Is it driven by revenue or expenses, or both?
- 2) **Setting the Price of Government:** Determining how much citizens are willing to pay.
- 3) **Setting the Priorities of Government:** Deciding which results citizens value most.
- 4) **Setting the Price of Each Priority:** Deciding how much the government will spend to produce each of these outcomes.
- 5) **Purchasing the Priorities:** Deciding how best to produce the desired results at the price citizens are willing to pay.⁷

There is something different, if not entirely new, here. The opening decade of the new millennium has both confirmed and confounded long-held economic theories

⁵The components in this case are data, metadata, business processes, rules, the application of rules, exception processing, and the like.

⁶David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson, *The Price of Government: Getting the Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis*, New York: Basic Books, 2004: 14.

⁷Osborne, 2004: 62.

The Sawyer Principles

The ability to prioritize followed almost three decades of important preparatory work on reinventing, retooling and reengineering government to fulfill existing mandates more efficiently and effectively.

of government. As a case in point, consider the long-held theoretical assumption that government lacks the economic discipline of the private sector. The economist Stiglitz asserts that governmental entities have only “a soft budget constraint, in that they do not face the same limits on their ability to run operating deficits as private-sector firms do.”⁸ On one hand, the federal government is running record deficits (in no small measure due to the cost of executing a foreign war). On the other, many state and local governments have cut deeply into their base budgets and reduced service to cope with declining revenues (including the loss of federal funding in many program areas), or borrowed heavily through the sale of bonds to close shortfalls in public budgets that are increasingly out of balance.

Indeed, the current trends force a revisiting of the long-held economic theory about private versus public production. Stiglitz sees government at a tipping point as it transitions to a digital economy. “On one hand, the public good nature of production in a digital economy, along with the presence of network externalities, may suggest a larger public role than in a bricks-and-mortar economy. On the other hand, an information-based economy may also improve the quality and reduce the cost of obtaining information, which by itself makes private markets work better than before. Furthermore, government failure may be even more pronounced in the context of rapidly moving information-laden markets than in traditional bricks-and-mortar markets.”⁹

Stiglitz allows that both the private and public sector are prone to many of the same potential failures, but points to certain vulnerabilities unique to government, “Bureaucrats may in particular act in a more risk-averse manner than is desirable, because they bear the full costs of failure but do not reap the full rewards of success.”¹⁰ Osborne and Hutchinson go further in their argument for public-sector leadership from what they call the radical center:

To be effective in today's world, leaders have to go beyond good intentions, wishes, and excuses that there isn't enough money. Virtually every government and every school district is squeezed for money-and will continue to be. Budget cuts and tax increases are the currency of the day. As a consequence, the public is cranky, and incumbent executives are at great risk-whether they are elected or appointed by elected officials.

The only way out of this trap is through a door labeled results. Leaders need to frame every debate and every decision in terms of the results they are trying to achieve-not needs, not wants, not the way it has always been, but results. Framing the discussion this way lets everyone know — both citizens and government insiders — what is most important. It also reinforces a culture of accountability throughout the public sector.¹¹

Such observations have been made in many contexts before, including by academic and professional organizations decrying the lack of true empowerment suffered by government employees and executives due to the unique character, public spotlight and political accountability of the public sector, in contrast to the difficult but more empowered decision-making environment that exists in the private sector. If such internal factors can thwart innovation and risk-taking in a public service environment, it follows they can also be a driver for innovation in a different frame if the uniquely governmental levers of public policy are strategically used by leaders to create opportunities for new approaches, creative ideas, non-traditional solutions to get a fair hearing, and serious consideration (and more than just a test implementation). In the absence of detailed policy guidance for navigating uncharted territory, it is useful to work from a set of principles to guide future actions.

⁸Stiglitz, 2004, *Op Cite*: 35.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p 36.

¹¹Osborne and Hutchinson, 314.

Part 11: The Principles-

RETHINKING ROLES

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:
“Why, it’s you, Ben! I warn’t noticing.”

“Say — I’m going in a-swimming, I am. Don’t you wish you could? But of course you’d druther work — wouldn’t you? Course you would!”

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:
“What do you call work?”
“Why, ain’t that work?”

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:
“Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain’t. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer.”

“Oh come, now, you don’t mean to let on that you like it?”
The brush continued to move.

“Like it? Well, I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth — stepped back to note the effect — added a touch here and there — criticised the effect again — Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

Presently he said:
“Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little.”

Whitewashing the Fence
From Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, Chapter Two, 1876

In a quest for new models of leadership and collaboration, government leaders have looked to authors and thinkers for ideas on modernizing organizations to meet the challenges of changing times — but largely to the exclusion of an American classic. Until now.

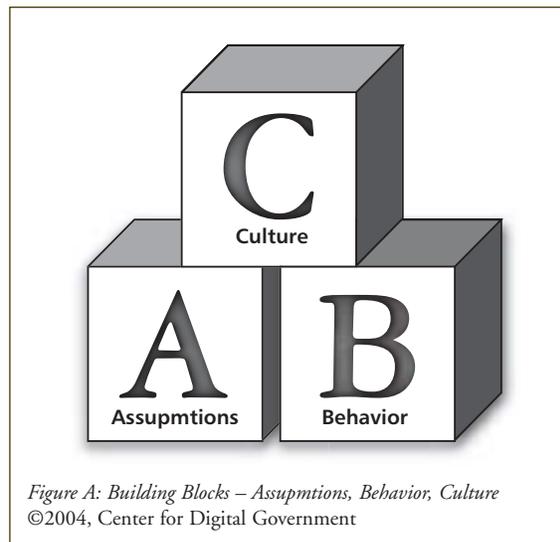
It is not uncommon to find well-thumbed copies of books by David Osborne, Ted Gaebler, Peter Plastrick, Peter Hutchinson, Jim Collins, Edwards Deming, Peter Drucker, Kenneth Blanchard, Robert S. Kaplan, Joseph Stiglitz, and even Sun Tzu¹² (among others) on the desks of public-sector executives, many with page corners folded to mark promising discoveries. These volumes and others

extract lessons of efficiency and effectiveness from well-tuned organizations that may be transferable to where they serve.

Most of these works have centered on the Herculean task of changing cultures, an undertaking that demands more time and money than is available to those who live within two-, four- or even six-year electoral cycles.

This white paper, *The Sawyer Principles*, backs up two steps to set the preconditions for cultural change, which is perhaps best illustrated by children’s building blocks. (See Figure A: Building Blocks — Assumptions, Behavior, Culture.) Culture is shaped by behaviors that are, in turn, shaped by assumptions.

The Sawyer Principles are rooted in the assumption that, by analogy, government can (and should) be the clever kid who rallies the community to act in the public interest and in a way that is consistent with the enlightened self interest of the network of contributors, thus allowing government to creatively exercise its truly unique societal role while not making the additional leap of assuming that everything that needs doing in society must be functionally absorbed into government itself rather than being left to entities and structures for whom such performance is a core competency. Even so, a key distinction must be made between appropriately avoiding an assumption that solutions must be government-



¹²For full citations, see Appendix: Eclectic Reading - Books on the Desks of Public Sector Executives at the end of this white paper.

The Sawyer Principles

centric (that is, that a function must be performed by government); and the opposite, which involves government-bashing (that is, that government has no appropriate role, even to facilitate public-private collaboration or drive strategies of public-service value). This latter model essentially casts government not as the clever kid, but as the stupid kid. That approach has contributed to the inefficiencies that bedevil government and has largely thwarted both internal reform and the development of wide-scale, effective multi-sector partnerships.

Government Getting Lost En Route to the Design Economy

In recent years, significant confusion has sometimes reigned as government agencies have been coached and pressed to act and perform “in a more businesslike manner,” or simply “more like a business” — only to then push the envelope boundaries of its role and activities to include new business products and services it observed the private sector providing in what has become known as the new economy. Indeed, government now finds itself sharply criticized for trying to be a competitive business within the larger economy.¹³ Some in the public sector have experienced the frustration of feeling caught in a ‘Catch 22’ of being criticized for undertaking the very innovations it thought it was being prodded to adopt. For some, the simple logic was compelling — since almost every function in society can find some corollary or similarity in the traditional functions of government, it seemed obvious that “acting more like a business” translated into adopting strategies where government would absorb the new Web-based functions and activities of the private sector into the range of activities government will perform for society going forward. After all, isn’t that what real electronic government is all about — product innovation, new business modalities and enhanced service to the citizen?

While this interpretation of government reengineering and reinvention may seem logical, on reflection it may be that acting more business-like may not be the same thing as actually undertaking those functions that government observes business performing in the commercial marketplace.¹⁴ Indeed, as budget crises have pressed heavily on most governments, it may be that such new investments

are not within the affordable range of the limited resources available. In this context, if sustainable public-sector enhancement is really to be achieved, acting more business-like may really have more to do with systemic adoption of process excellence and performance management — including results measurement, performance accountability, ongoing productivity improvements, cost-benefit analysis and justification, and functional process simplification. In that light, perhaps the real key for the future will be fuller utilization of the Internet and its allied set of new tools, and borrowing the best ideas from the most effective management models available from the world of business, to break down stove-piping or smoke-stacking of government functions along traditional organizational lines. Digital technologies are often touted for enabling more efficient operations. That’s true, as far as it goes. But as author and Harvard Professor Clayton Christianson famously observed, technology is also inherently disruptive.¹⁵ Throughout history, technologies have not made old processes better — they have destroyed them. In their place, technology helps to create a new platform for governing — with new processes better suited to the needs and expectations of contemporary society. With this new platform, the performance of government can be more effectively monitored and improved over time. In this new environment, each of the players — government, industry and not-for-profit — play to strength as they do the public’s business.

The Way Forward

Sorting out roles, responsibilities and functions between the public and private sectors in the new economy — itself being honed and perfected through experimentation and multiple iterations in state and local governments, which Justice Louis D. Brandeis famously called “laboratories of democracy.” The work of these laboratories is not done. In fact, the opening decade of the new century may be best remembered for whether they help find new models of collaboration, economy and efficiency, which is actually very much at the core of the challenge for government reinvention and reengineering for the future.

David Osborne has been a longtime and keen observer of these laboratories of democracy. In *The Price of Government*, Osborne and Hutchinson lay out a 10-point plan for states and localities to navigate the wake of a sustained public-sector revenue recession:

¹³The new economy appeared to act differently than what had come before. Alternatively known as the experience, support and design economies, it is predicated on the idea that the Internet changes everything. In the decade since the emergence of the commodity Internet, the network-of-networks did change everything — just not always in the ways we anticipated. Such imperfect prediction has had serendipitous results in some areas but it has also proved disorienting for some in the transition to digital government.

¹⁴As is often noted, government is ultimately not a business. At a minimum, it can not choose its customers because it has a public mission to serve everybody. There are things that simply do not pencil out — business would never do them (without incentives or subsidies) but government must do them.

¹⁵Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, Harvard Business School Press, 1997.

1) Strategic Reviews: Divesting to Invest ... [C]reate ongoing review processes — outside the budget process ... to develop new strategies and eliminate programs that are not central to their core purposes or are no longer valuable to citizens. [In other words, change your resource allocation to reflect your true priorities.]

2) Consolidation ... [Rather than merging organizations], a much more powerful alternative is to consolidate funding streams and “steering” authority, so steering (policy) organizations can purchase results from any “rowing” organizations — public or private — that can best produce them.

3) Rightsizing ... The keys to success are to find the right size, then to make sure your organization has the right mix of skills to maximize the value delivered.

4) Buying Services Competitively ... The fastest way to save money and increase value is to force public institutions to compete. Nobody who doesn't own one thinks monopoly is good for business.

5) Rewarding Performance, Not Good Intentions ... Set performance targets at all levels, measure performance against them, and reward those who improve. In a time of fiscal crisis, however, positive outcomes aren't enough. The new imperative is improving outcomes for less money: value for dollars.

6) Smarter Customer Service: Putting Customers in the Driver's Seat ... When public organizations let their customers choose between providers, rather than imposing services on them, they can achieve much greater customer satisfaction at less cost.

7) Don't Buy Mistrust — Eliminate It ... The sad truth of bureaucracy is that 20 percent of government spending is designed merely to control the other 80 percent. The ruling assumption is that most of us, given the opportunity, will lie, cheat and steal.

8) Using Flexibility to Get Accountability ... [The rise of] “performance-based organizations” that have willingly accepted greater accountability in return for freedom from rules and regulations that impede performance.

9) Making Administrative Systems Allies, Not Enemies ... Traditional budget, accounting, personnel, procurement, and audit systems are nests of red tape that tie employees up in knots. The messages these systems

send about following bureaucratic rules are much more powerful than any leadership exhortations to perform better. To get lasting improvements in performance, public leaders have to modernize and streamline these systems.

10) Smarter Work Processes: Tools from Industry ... [O]rganizations must ultimately change the way they work. Some of this involves wholesale substitution of new methods and strategies. But much of it requires that existing work processes of all kinds ... be streamlined.¹⁶

In *The Price of Government*, Osborne and Hutchinson profile the case of Washington State Priorities of Government initiative and used their Budgeting for Outcomes approach to successfully triage the initial onslaught of a budget crisis. The authors note that the next step for Washington is to shop for their prioritized list of desired results, “soliciting offers from all comers and choosing what to buy from a broad array of responses.”¹⁷

Such an approach may seem obvious — or it may appear counterintuitive on first appearance — but it is the story of overcoming inertia by disrupting the order of things. Returning to the building blocks depicted in Figure A, inertia attempts to hold jealously guarded assumptions and behaviors in place. Yet culture can only be disrupted and transformed when the blocks below it are knocked out — replaced with new assumptions and different behaviors.

To see inertia busting in action, you need look no farther than a classic American story. As the name suggests, *The Sawyer Principles* draw their inspiration from *Tom Sawyer Whitewashes The Fence*, despite the sardonic caution by author Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) that he never intended it as a management text or case study. In fact, he warns, “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.”

The warning may have held us at bay in the 128 years since the story's publication — but no more! At a time when cabinet-level executive retreats can spend days considering the question, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, surely it is worth considering the central question of government service delivery — Who does the public's business — and how? Enter our protagonist — “Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush” — from whose story we derive these modest propositions interpolated from the Mark Twain original and presented here as *The Sawyer Principles*:

¹⁶Osborne and Hutchinson, 13-17.

¹⁷Osborne and Hutchinson, 82-83.

The Sawyer Principles

1) Tom on What Government Must Be Good At from the Start: What It Knows and Controls and How Far Its Resources Will Go

Measuring the Far-Reaching Continent of Unwhitewashed Fence and Knowing What It Looks Like When It's Done

THE STORY:

"He surveyed the fence ... Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high."

"He got out his worldly wealth and examined it — bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom."

THE APPLICATION:

Young Tom's key strategic advantage was his unique, intimate understanding of the scope and type of the work to be done. Importantly, Tom knew what done looked like — not just the 'what' of done, nor just 'how' it was going to get done, but the 'why' behind doing it. He also understood that he could not afford to simply buy a solution at prevailing rates. He was able to meet and exceed the original business requirements — the fence ended up with three coats of whitewash — because he optimized the efforts of others by defining the work at the outset and monitoring performance to keep resources fresh and the work progressing apace. All of which underscores the importance of knowing the work requirements authoritatively because it is impossible to either staff or outsource a mystery.

2) Tom on the Perils of Isolation: When You Need Friends, It is Too Late to Go Find Them

Coming to Terms With the Multiplying Sorrows of Going It Alone and What Government Cannot Do by Itself

THE STORY:

"Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation; did it again; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence ... all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit."

THE APPLICATION:

Tom's despair stemmed from the sinking realization that there was more work than he could do alone, a sentiment shared with many public servants who live with the conflict between infinite demand and finite resources. Tom and the government would often rather suffer and pout

than make friends of those they do not consider worthy. Moreover, like Tom, government has many things it would MUCH rather do than whitewash the fences. But if government tries to do too much by itself, the fence is left undone or done badly — an all-too-familiar public-sector outcome and source of long-standing criticism. At a time when governments are structurally broken and fiscally broke, they risk becoming a single point of failure for all of what they have responsibility, but not the means to succeed. Mitigating those risks is best done through working with others. In modern parlance, government needs a matrixed or networked service delivery system in concert with private and not-for-profit organizations bound together in common public purpose through enlightened self-interest.

3) Tom on the Work that Suits Government: Leading Because Government is the Only One that Can

Evangelizing the 'Why' of Government by Leveraging Magnificent Inspiration to Innovate Through a Hopeless Moment

THE STORY:

"At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration."

Tom went on whitewashing — Ben ranged up alongside of him ...

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey? ..."

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't that work?"

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't."

All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."

THE APPLICATION:

The magnificent inspiration can be summarized in a single word: leadership. Tom, by making the opportunity to whitewash the fence a scarce and valued commodity, made others, somewhat irrationally, want to do it. At that point, he was the leader of the fence project and fence whitewashing foreman. All this was done in the context of a distasteful task. Imagine the opportunities when others see the task as a shared responsibility in which 'there is something in it for me and my values.' During his military career, Colin Powell described a leader as "someone the troops will follow if only out of a sense of curiosity." Exactly. Absent the overwhelming force that characterized the Powell doctrine, Tom led in place by cobbling together an unlikely army whose curiosity became commitment to otherwise undesirable work.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has built its emergency responses around the same

inspiration, characterized by comprehensive collaboration among government, community groups, businesses, and individuals. Going it alone is now the exception that proves the rule of collaboration and the merits of interdependence. As discussed later, the decoupling of government's unique steering function and the rowing functions (the burden of which can be shared with any number and configuration of third parties) increases capacity exponentially while focusing government on its unique core competence (see Principle One).

4) Tom on Achieving Consequential Results: Getting It Right Before Getting It Done

Understanding the Differences Between "What" and "How," Armed with a Bucket of Whitewash and a Long-Handled Brush

THE STORY:

"Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation; did it again; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence ..."

THE APPLICATION:

Tom's inspiration followed his darkest moment as he studied his pathetic streak of paint. In this moment, he saw both how hard it would be to do right and what 'right' would have to look like. Tom's ultimate success as promoter/recruiter/project manager relied on maintaining a keen understanding of core competence — of government itself, its contractors, partners and networked collaborators in the service of a larger public purpose.

The free market orientation of Dr. Stiglitz finds common cause with the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) and the Progress and Freedom Foundation (PFF) in a conviction that government efforts should complement not duplicate, private-sector efforts. Specifically, PPI asserts, "Public funds ... should not be used as venture capital to launch government agencies into competition with the private sector. There are too many necessary functions of government which are either going unfulfilled, or being poorly performed in outmoded ways, to be able to justify in an era of limited budgets spending taxpayer dollars on activities which fundamentally change the role of government in our economy."¹⁸

It is worth noting that Sawyer's approach was technologically neutral. All of his recruits used the tools at hand, but the underlying method would have been just as effective if the bucket and brush had been exchanged for a better brush, better paint or even a power sprayer to paint

the fence white in no time. In fact, had one of his recruits come up with such a newfangled device, Tom would have surely seized on the opportunity to make the process itself exponentially more efficient by automating what he called "hateful work" so he and the other boys could go onto to ... well, play.

5) Tom on Rediscovering the Spirit of Public Service: When Work Becomes Play

Coveting the Play of Difficult Work by Making it Difficult to Attain

THE STORY:

"[I]n order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."

THE APPLICATION:

It is rare to read a suggestion to play at the public's business but, in this context, "play" may be exactly the right thing to do. One person's work is another's play if the obligation to do it is removed. If the task can be deconstructed into its parts, then the work can be distributed to those who find it the most rewarding or who can turn drudgery into child's play. Public employees, civic groups and the private sector can all be given the incentive to covet some parts of the work that might conventionally be done by monolithic government. That appetite (coupled with a broader view of public interest) invites the creation of new models of collaboration across sectors. Networked collaboration makes strange bedfellows — on purpose, enabling the engagement of core competencies and the pooling of resources, while amortizing expenses and workload across multiple entities.

The other more subtle challenge presented by Tom is how to make parts of work in the service of a larger public purpose be perceived as exclusive, coveted and difficult to obtain. One hint at how government has done this in other areas is professional licensing. The obstacles and limitations to becoming a doctor or lawyer are many and difficult while those to becoming a teacher are fewer and much easier. We reward them accordingly. We also use this approach with volunteer programs where there is an exclusive process and it is considered an honor to be accepted. This ranges from appointments to boards and commissions to being named the official garbage pickers for roadside ditches through "adopt-a-highway"

¹⁸Robert D. Atkinson and Jacon Ulevich, *Digital Government: The Next Step to Reengineering the Federal Government*, Progressive Policy Institute Technology & New Economy Project, March 2000: 12.

The Sawyer Principles

programs. Clearly, creating the perception of scarcity and exclusivity is more important than the reality of the actual number of people or who among them actually gets to do the task.

Open and competitive public-sector procurement shares some these attributes too. Requests for Proposals offer access to an exclusive segment of the market in exchange for favorable pricing, commitments to meet the unique needs of public entities and, in some cases, invest in a local presence or provide other benefits to the community.

The cable television industry made such commitments to gain access to scarce rights of way, creating the national C-SPAN programming services to meet federal requirements and setting aside capacity for public, educational and governmental channels in negotiating local cable franchise agreements.

6) Tom on the Currency of Collaboration: Building a New Generation of Networked Agents of Government on Behalf of the People They All Serve

Trading Playthings and Skylarking with the Strange Whitewash Fellows of Networked Collaboration

THE STORY:

"[After] trading playthings ... he had ... twelve marbles ... a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar — but no dog — the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash."

THE APPLICATION:

Governments have long relied on agents and other third parties who are not in their direct employ to help administer public programs. Public health delivery relies in no small part on such arrangements as does more mundane day-to-day transactions. Mom and pop businesses handle huge volumes of vehicle registration renewals, bait and supply stores sell fishing and hunting licenses, and convenience stores do a brisk business in lottery tickets.

Acting as an agent of government — or doing work that is publicly financed, subsidized, under incentive, or for which you volunteer — requires partners in earnest (meaning that everybody has skin in the game) and is best served by sustainable relationships. Acting as an agent of the citizen customer¹⁹ requires only that you play well and that you and your customer each get the benefit of the bargain — no matter whether the currency of exchange is

marbles, money or membership. Non-governmental entities (defined broadly to include all the for-profit and not-for-profit private sector) need to advance the public interest by acting positively and proactively in their own interest if they want the long arm of government to shorten. They can act so by being trusted partners, willing volunteers and service providers to citizens. Then, the "work" is transformed into self-sustaining and profitable "play" when it is distributed into a network of existing and emerging processes, services, economies of scale, centers of expertise, exercise of citizenship, and centers of goodwill and giving. With a better distribution of the incentives and talents, the paying and playing will make the fence shine white in perpetuity.

7) Tom on Rethinking the Problem: Getting a Chance to Whitewash a Little

Knowing What Government is Going to Do and What Others Will Do by Putting the Thing in a New Light

THE STORY:

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light.... Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little..."

THE APPLICATION:

That the commercial interests that do business with government market their services as solutions suggest an entrenched practice of viewing government as a collection of problems. Collaboration necessarily puts the thing in a new light — an environment for sharing risk and sharing reward in doing the heavy lifting, but in which public and private are equals in the enterprise.

It is incumbent on government to motivate the right partners, and be very selective in doing it "I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done." As important is the hard work of deflecting the wrong ones. In Tom's case, Jim was already overcommitted to do other work for Aunt Polly and had a conflict of interest in that she had explicitly prohibited him from whitewashing the fence. Putting the thing in a new light reminds us that perspec-

¹⁹See page 17 below for an extended discussion of the customer agent concept as the new front line of service delivery, or what might be called the new service delivery layer.

tive matters. An apocryphal story of another young boy who longed for a pony of his own is instructive. One day he found himself in a room full of horse manure. He was ecstatic, declaring, “There’s got be a pony in there somewhere!” A more subtle take on the same theme is found in the observation of former Washington State CIO Steve Kolodney, “Sometimes we focus on the shadows created by new opportunities rather than the opportunities themselves.”

Sometimes we cannot solve underlying problems because we think about challenges the wrong way. There is a tendency to think only about doing more with less rather than doing things differently — about avoiding threats rather than managing risk — or about meeting new mandates within existing resources, rather than fully ‘considering the substantial change taking place in our worldly circumstances.’

8) Tom on Doing Things Differently: When Doing More With Less is Not Enough

Alacrity in a Leader’s Heart by Finding the Right Answer at the Right Time

THE STORY:

“Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart....

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances ...

THE APPLICATION:

While missions remain constant, the means to realizing the mission changes over time — and it should. (The old computer science and venture capitalist axiom is that if computing power increases by an order of magnitude, you should not be doing the same thing 10 times faster, you should be doing something different.)

The takeaway from Tom is to remain focused on the prize — in our case, purposefully acting in the public interest, even if the actions are not the way a predecessor would have done it. Moreover, leading is about taking responsibility for ensuring that there is no loss of vital public service delivery or loss of public accountability. Finally, it was the realization that a different way was possible that lead to new assumptions (a different worldview), new behaviors in how the work was done, and hence a different culture for how to solve problems when resources are perpetually scarce.

9) Tom on Public Accountability: Being Somebody’s Aunt Polly

Professionalizing Public Service and Maintaining Public Trust

THE STORY:

Jim was only human — this attraction was too much for him... In another moment he was flying down the street with his pail and a tingling rear, Tom was whitewashing with vigor, and Aunt Polly was retiring from the field with a slipper in her hand and triumph in her eye.

THE APPLICATION:

When Aunt Polly made Tom Sawyer responsible and accountable for results, he had the incentive to do it through the means he imagined and make it better and more successful by the way he carried it out. He chose the best available means to reaching ends: creating an informal community of interest — each member of which brought resources that would have been out of reach if Tom had acted alone. Importantly, even Tom understood the rules as we see at the end of the story when he “wended toward headquarters to report” that the task was done, but he followed the Sawyer rule that government must learn — he did not disclose how he made it easy, fast and good.

All parties to the “doing of the public’s business” are held to account for what they do — and what they do not do. Ultimate accountability for the availability and reliability (and cost effectiveness) rests with government leaders. They, in turn, hold partners and collaborators responsible for execution. Public service raises the bar on everyone who accepts taxpayer funds to do the work, or for which public policies or other incentives are established to serve as motivators — the public employee, the private business or community organization.

For her part, Aunt Polly kept everybody on task as overseer and enforcer — roles that are consistently performed in the public sector and which may be its Achilles heal. In its comprehensive review of contracting practices by the federal government, the U.S. Department of Labor found that, “Many public jurisdictions do not have well-established means to set effective bid requirements and conditions, to thoroughly evaluate the bids, and then to measure performance.” From an economic perspective, this weakness undermines government as a trusted business partner. Stiglitz observes, “The lack of higher enforcement authority may mean that the government is unable to make credible commitments over extended periods of time.”²⁰

²⁰Stiglitz, 2004: 36.

The Sawyer Principles

Any system can fall prey to abuse or opportunistic behavior. That is true of those who administer programs and those who do the work — public, private and not-for-profit. Effective enforcements requires penalties that actually deter behavior and cannot be written off as just a cost of doing business. The enforcement and penalty process must ultimately be believable — such that bad actors believe that they can be caught and punished. Aunt Molly's penalties were clearly enforceable and believable as she laid out the consequences for Tom. She needed to say only, "... or I'll tan you."

This is a non-trivial matter, especially given a procurement culture in the private sector that owes its origins to a crackdown on the excesses and corruption of New York's infamous Tammany Hall. Likewise, holding non-governmental players to high standards in terms of substantive responsiveness and institutional responsibility are essential to success and the public trust. The most strategic professionalization of the civil service is to develop sophisticated agents to correct the systemic contracting deficiencies without succumbing to the temptation to shadow box with the ghost of Boss Tweed.

10) Tom on Results: From Pale Streaks to Three Coats of Whitewash Thanks to A Good Plan, A Smart Leader and Some Helpful Friends

Realizing Results in Interdependent Government Through Networks of Collaboration

THE STORY:

By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite ... and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with — and so on, and so on, hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came,

from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth...

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while — plenty of company — and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

THE APPLICATION:

The number of coats required by Aunt Polly: 1.

The number of coats applied by going it alone: 0

The number of coats applied with a little help from your friends: 3

The value of collaboration: Priceless.

Incoming administrations often declare their intent to move from process to results. In rare cases, they take the time to work backwards from the desired results with a view to overhauling old, tired processes that will get them there.

Young Tom knew how things had always been done, but was not bound by the old rules. Aunt Polly was concerned with achieving results, which, in this case, was a whitewashed fence. She was astonished that Tom got the job done — "Well, I never! There's no getting around it, you can work when you're a mind to, Tom" — but never asked how he did it. Today's citizens have a great deal in common with Aunt Polly.

If there is nothing as practical as a good theory, it follows that *The Sawyer Principles* ought to give rise to a new model for collaborative service delivery by government and its partners — a matter to which we now turn our attention.

Part III: The Model

RETHINKING COLLABORATION

True to the lost art of whitewashing a fence, the model for networked collaboration in government service delivery is a hybrid of previously discrete disciplines. As with Tom Sawyer's collection of riches — “a kite ... twelve marbles ... a spool cannon ... a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a brass door-knob ... the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash” (analogous to votes, customer satisfaction, adequate financial support, and high public approval ratings) — the whole model may well be greater than the sum of its parts. That said, the elements of the model merit the intrigue of more than just 13-year-old boys. Our assembled treasure with which the model is built comes in four layers:

The Economic Layer, drawing on the work of Dr. Stiglitz; **The Service Delivery Layer**, based on the distinction between the “steering” and “rowing” functions of government; **The Web Services Technical Layer** (and other standard means of automating electronic interactions), based on the linkages of formerly discrete Internet applications and databases to deliver complete electronic transactions and services; and,

The Collaborative Whitewashing Layer, drawn from the mischievous genius of our subversively helpful barefooted protagonist.

Taken together, these elements comprise *The Sawyer Model: A Framework for Recasting Public Service as Web Services* (Figure B). As will be discussed in detail, the core of the model is a renewed understanding of the core competencies of government and those of their partners and brethren in the private sector and non-governmental civil society. Core competency is the center of concentric circles that help sort the components of public service delivery into three types of activities — those for which government **sets rules**, those that government is uniquely able to provide directly and must **syndicate** for itself, and those important support activities that are already provided by others to which government can **subscribe** and **leverage**.

To understand the whole, as depicted in Figure B, the discussion that follows helps to unpack the model layer by layer:

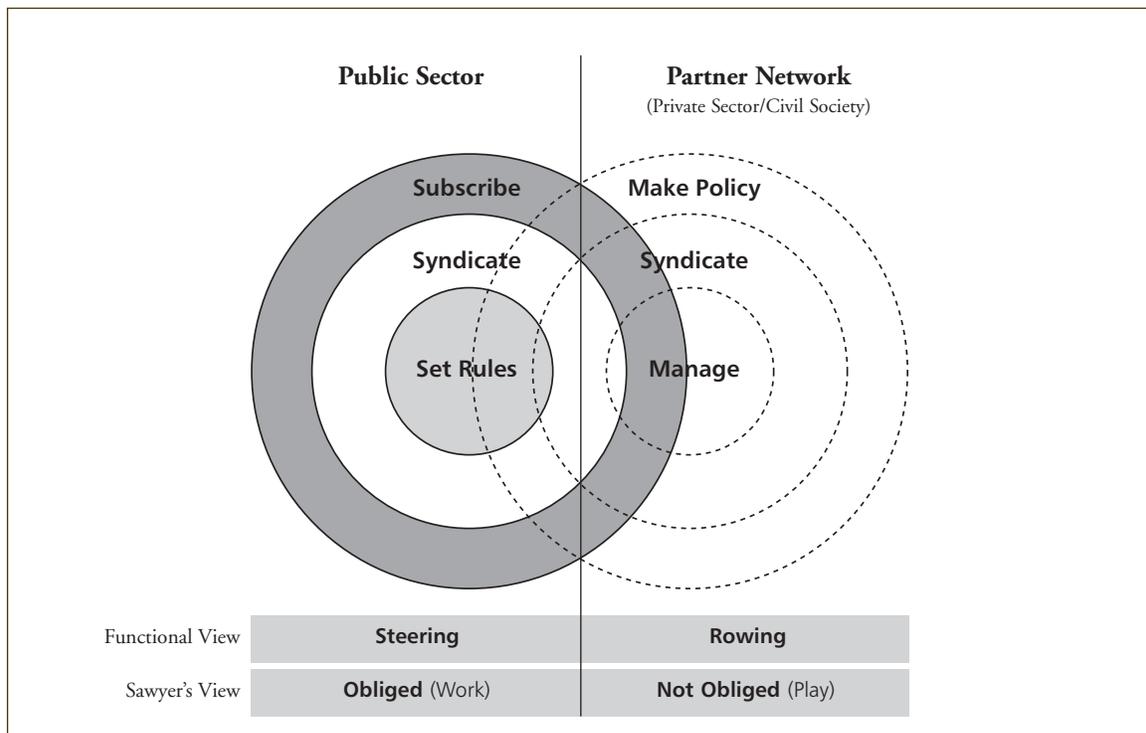


Figure B: *The Sawyer Model: A Framework for Recasting Public Service as Web Services*
©2004, Center for Digital Government

The Sawyer Principles

The Collaborative Whitewashing Layer invites new players in and changes the behaviors of incumbents. In the playful postscript to his story of *Tom Sawyer Whitewashes a Fence*, Twain muses, “If [Tom] had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work entails whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever the body is not obliged to do.” An examination of the process of delivering public services requires a determination of what is work for government (that which it is obliged to do) and what is play (that which is best done in concert with others who gladly do their part).

The Service Delivery Layer need not be exclusively governmental to be trustworthy. Former Iowa Legislator and CIO Richard Varn, now a senior fellow with the Center for Digital Government, has been advancing the idea that once the data elements, business processes and business rules of a governmental process or form have been defined, documented and published, anyone can do the work of government through a customer agent, commercial service or software product. The enduring lesson from the historic government practice of relying on so-called ‘mom and pop’ small business to act as its subagents is being replicated by new generation of dot-com agents. In line and online, people will conduct their government-related business with any entity that they trust that offers better customer service and a good bargain. For the agents and sub agents, it is like child’s play.

Varn notes that agents doing things on our behalf with government have been around for a long time (consider the roles of lawyers, accountants and the like), but that the rise of ubiquitous networked computing, standardized and automated data, e-forms, and transactions have made it possible to extend that model to most every area of government. In fact, he argues that it is likely that most all transactional governmental functions over the next 10 to 20 years will be built into software and service we already use. Consider how much this has occurred with previously discrete features, software packages and companies that got absorbed into software suites and systems at the desktop and in the back office — from word processing and calendars to finance, budget, payroll, purchasing, and even client eligibility. Now imagine government transactions being one of those features and functions. Further, he argues that policy formulation and citizen advocacy (the acts of steering the ship of state) are the essence of sovereignty while the acts of rowing (processing and utility functions are not). Government is the uniquely trusted partner in the former, but not the latter. Given the customer agent trends Varn has identified, government may be put out of the business of doing a lot of the rowing, whether it wants to get out or not. So focusing

on the essence of sovereignty and the inherently governmental, where unique value is added, is a good long-term survival strategy.

To use a nautical analogy, inherently governmental functions were traditionally understood to include both the functions related to steering and rowing. However, a contemporary view suggests that while steering in the public interest may indeed be “inherently governmental,” rowing duties can be shared among networked collaborators from two or more sectors — assuming a legitimate public interest exists, and that the rowers add unique value and external expertise to doing the public’s interest.

Constitutionally, it does not get more inherently governmental than providing for the common defense. And for the first 200 years of the republic, both steering and rowing in the armed services were largely all government, all the time. In recent decades, a growing group of vital rowing functions has gone to third parties. The change, perhaps most pronounced in the military, has taken root in many state, local and tribal governments. While governments remain publicly accountable for both steering and rowing, they have chosen out of both necessity and preference to recruit others to help propel the ship forward instead of rowing alone.

The origins of this bifurcated steering-rowing view of government functions are unclear, but it is central to current reform efforts in the public sector. For their part, Osborne and Hutchinson provide a helpful synopsis of the advantages of consolidating steering functions and decoupling them from rowing functions:

- It keeps policymakers from getting sucked into the minutiae of operations. They can focus on the big picture: setting goals, contracting with excellent providers to deliver on those goals, and monitoring progress...
- It frees leaders from much of their political captivity to service providers. In traditional systems, employees with a vested interest too often have the power to block changes that could help customers.
- It minimizes micromanagement. Contracting with independent organizations to operate programs gives genuine management control to those programs. The steering organization sets overall policy, vision and goals and chooses which mix of operators can best meet those goals, but it is not authorized to meddle in day-to-day management.²¹

²¹Osborne and Hutchinson, 122-123.

On this last point, the arms-length approach to day-to-day management works except when those at the helm feel certain constituent and customer service needs merit a higher priority than they are receiving from those holding the oars.

The resulting environment allows people and organizations to whitewash the fence well by playing to their strengths and leveraging the competencies of others in doing the public's business. It also positions public organizations to take advantaged of a networked world — networks as used metaphorically here and by Goldsmith and Eggers in *Governing by Network*. Importantly, the benefits extend beyond the metaphor. We turn our attention to taking advantaged of the network world in the more literal, technical sense to explore the transformational impact of Web services (as part of a larger digital platform for governing) to enable matrixed government service delivery.

The Web Services Technical Layer

Prioritizing government initiatives does the hard work of deciding the “what” of government. Web services in this context is a catchall for the leading edge of the IT architectural evolution and a useful way to think about the “how” of public service. “How” is the sweet spot of IT, especially when “what” is clearly defined. Web services in a narrow sense is a term²² of art for technologies built to support collaboration among formerly discrete systems and services. (See sidebar on Web Services Definition.) Broadly viewed, it provides another way of viewing the question of “inherently governmental.” In that light, government has three options in a Web services world — to subscribe, syndicate or set rules.²³

Subscribe: When a Web service that can help meet a public need already exists, the responsible agency need only subscribe to and/or leverage that service — provided appropriate incentives exist for others to do the work. Portals that feature local weather information are already doing it. For example, governments properly have a relationship to their unemployed residents, but public agencies need not duplicate Web services already readily available through Monster and other commercial job seeker resources.

Syndicate: There are some elements of a governmental process or transaction for which there is no existing Web service to which others can subscribe. This is especially the case when a public agency provided a specialized function necessary

WEB SERVICES DEFINITION

Some definitional clarity may be in order. The term Web services has a very specific meaning despite loose or imprecise common usage. Web services are uniquely able to support the kind of networked collaboration anticipated here — set, syndicate, subscribe — because of the following characteristics: (a) Web services refer to distributed or virtual applications or processes that use the Internet to link activities or software components. A travel Web site that takes a reservation from a customer, and then sends a message to a hotel application, accessed via the Web, to determine if a room is available, books it, and tells the customer he or she has a reservation is an example of a Web Services application. (b) Standards-based Web services use XML to interact with each other, which allows them to link up on demand using loose coupling. (c) A Web-based application that can dynamically interact with other Web applications using an XML message protocol such as SOAP, XML-RPC or XMLP. Examples of emerging standards for describing, promoting and discovering these services are ebXML, UDDI and WSDL, and Microsoft's .NET and Sun's Sun ONE are major implementations of the concept. The goal is to enable one application to find another on the Internet that provides a needed service and to seamlessly exchange data with it. If the service is fee-based, payment processing could be included. (Sources: bptrends.com, looselycoupled.com, fujitsu.com, www.apimarketing.com.)

to complete a transaction — such as certifying compliance with a particular regulatory requirement. In such circumstances, a public entity may need to syndicate a service to which others will subscribe.

Set Rules: The syndication or subscription decision is predicated on a clear articulation of the rules for conducting the public's business. The greatest service that public agencies can contribute during budget-induced doldrums is to define the data, business rules and system requirements for the use, syndication or subscription of Web services to complete business processes

²³Adapted from the column: Paul W. Taylor, “The End of Architecture: Where Public Service and Web Services Meet,” *Government Technology*, August 2003.

The Sawyer Principles

required by government. At a minimum, a government entity needs to be ready to officially receive the data that fulfills a requirement of law or completes a transaction when it is submitted by a citizen or customer agent (let them white-wash the fence as they see fit as long as it meets the specifications).

This three-prong approach does a couple of things that are important to the perennial campaign for government modernization, reengineering and reinvention. It wraps a nimble architecture around inherently governmental functions while leveraging inherently non-governmental capabilities and assets, that can then facilitate delivery by the most efficient and flexible means available, while providing a hedge against building tomorrow's legacy systems today.

The balance between syndicating and subscribing — which are both rowing functions — is likely to change over time as digital government matures. Government can steer by setting the rules by which public services are delivered, either directly or through networked agents or both.

Government also has the statutory responsibility to maintain the authoritative public record of what happened to whom, who did what, and with what effect. Public accountability rests on such transparency. Moreover, systematically catching, storing and analyzing accountability data is important to assessing performance of individual agents and the system as a whole.

A Web services view of public service also reflects the historic way communities once worked (and are supposed to work) through collaboration among networked individuals, community groups, businesses, and government, and help to make permanent what has tended to be temporary, community-based responses to emergencies as we find flexible ways to do the larger body of the public's business.

The Economic Layer incorporates a separate set of principles developed by Stiglitz et al for government action in a digital economy. The principles attempted to compensate for a “lack of clear theoretical guidance regarding the separation between government and business in a digital economy [which] makes decision-making rules all the more important.” They are divided into three categories: “green-light” activities that raise few concerns; “yellow-light” activities that raise increasing levels of concern; and “red-light” activities that raise significant concern. The stoplight metaphor of green, yellow and red-light categories are mapped to the concentric circles of setting rules, syndicating and subscribing in the Sawyer Model, which are based on the Stiglitz criteria and the details of which follow:

TWELVE PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION IN A DIGITAL ECONOMY

“Green Light” for Online and Informational Government Activity

PRINCIPLE ONE: Providing public data and information is a proper governmental role.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Improving the efficiency with which governmental services are provided is a proper governmental role.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Supporting of basic research is a proper governmental role.

“Yellow Light” for Online and Informational Government Activity

PRINCIPLE FOUR: The government should exercise caution in adding specialized value to public data and information.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: The government should only provide private goods, even if private-sector firms are not providing them, under limited circumstances.

PRINCIPLE SIX: The government should only provide a service online if private provision with regulation or appropriate taxation would not be more efficient.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: The government should ensure that mechanisms exist to protect privacy, security and consumer protection online.

PRINCIPLE EIGHT: The government should promote network externalities only with great deliberation and care.

PRINCIPLE NINE: The government should be allowed to maintain proprietary information or exercise rights under patents and/or copyrights only under special conditions (including national security).

“Red Light” for Online and Informational Government Activity

PRINCIPLE TEN: The government should exercise substantial caution in entering markets in which private-sector firms are active.

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN: The government (including government corporations) should generally not aim to maximize net revenues or take actions that would reduce competition.

This three-prong approach does a couple of things that are important to the perennial campaign for government modernization, reengineering and reinvention.

PRINCIPLE TWELVE: The government should only be allowed to provide goods or services for which appropriate privacy and conflict-of-interest protections have been erected.

This collection of digital economy principles provides a useful means of evaluating and testing public-sector concepts through both economic analysis and common sense, and serves a particularly useful purpose in an era that will be budget constrained and revenue limited for years to come. And Stiglitz concludes that the “appropriate role of government in the economy is not a static concept: It must evolve as the economy and technology do.”²⁴

Stiglitz’s principles came at a critical time for political subdivisions, as states and localities were forced by the punishing public-sector revenue recession to reassess the priorities of government and reassess where government fits best in the new economy. Conventional approaches to business process reengineering were no longer enough — nor was the popular but misguided mantra of doing more with less. Doing more with less will not get us where we need to be. The only approach that will suit the time is to do things differently consistent with the power and opportunities of our modern technology toolset. That is the unique strength of Budgeting for Outcomes, a spending plan that Tom Sawyer would love. Osborne and Hutchinson describe their priorities-based model for fiscal planning and managed competition this way:

Budgeting for Outcomes starts with the results most important to citizens, then purchases programs and activities from all comers to achieve those results. It takes no existing programs as

givens; it asks all programs to compete with other public and private organizations to deliver results at the best price. It combines program budgeting’s focus on programs rather than organizations, performance budgeting’s focus on the results of those programs, zero-based budgeting’s habit of reexamining priorities every budget cycle, and managed competition’s method of letting all kinds of organizations, public and private, compete to deliver programs.²⁵

And it is against this backdrop that there has been a growing explicit assumption that government will have to do less of even the priority activities themselves (or directly) — relying instead on any number and type of third parties to deliver services and manage internal functions in range of formal and informal relationships.

Ideally, the Stiglitz and Osborne models play well together and with *The Sawyer Principles* — with Stiglitz defining the “what” through prioritizing the desired outcomes, Osborne defining “how” best to buy those outcomes, and Tom pointing the way to lead and redefine the process. Ultimately, accountability for public service delivery rests with public officials, regardless of the means used. However, as Tom and the *Sawyer Principles* show, that need not be a solitary responsibility, but one that is shared with networked non-governmental collaborators. The operative adage for this lesson is even older than Tom’s story: “Many hands make light work.” For a leader to make that so, he or she must find the best fit among the doers of deeds in conducting the public’s business — in the community and on the network.

Doing more with less will not get us where we need to be. The only approach that will suit the time is to do things differently consistent with the power and opportunities of our modern technology toolset.

²⁴Stiglitz, 2000: 5.

²⁵Osborne and Hutchinson, 85.

Part IV: The Call-

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP

Earlier in the story referenced above, we are told that the length and height of the fence was overwhelming to even the likes of Tom Sawyer — “all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit.” Likewise, government can be excused for feeling the pressure of meeting old obligations and new expectations. To them, it is always “Same Fence, Different Day.” At the same time, the public has a reasonable expectation that government will act as Tom Sawyer would in doing the hard work in the public square.

To be clear, there is some work that is the exclusive purview of government. Not only does it make sense for government to do it, government is the **ONLY** one that can do it. And at the same time, in the American model of government, society and economy, there are also functions that are most appropriately performed by the private sector and other non-governmental entities rather than by government. Indeed, under the American model the rights of the individual, as much as the assertion of the common good, were held up as the principled basis for our constitutional democracy.

The conventional politics of left and right have pitted these competing goods against each other. *The Sawyer Principles* suggest that there is no need to reconcile friends. Osborne and Hutchinson argue that friends meet in the radical center to do what needs to be done:

It is time to move beyond the outworn ideologies of left and right.... [W]e can turn fiscal crisis into an opportunity [and] wring far more value out of our public institutions.... [W]e must cut government down to its most effective size and shape ... use competition to squeeze more value out of every tax dollar; make every program, organization, and employee accountable for results; use technology to empower customers and save money; and reform how government works on the inside (its management systems and bureaucratic rules) to improve its performance on the outside.²⁶

Just as Sawyer recruited willing collaborators with considerable cunning, government needs to be a sophisticated partner with third parties in those activities where industry is used to extend a public mission or realize a public purpose.

Finally, Sawyer created informal networks to get the fence painted and to end up at the swimming hole. Similarly, government needs to look beyond conventional internal

and contract resources to do the public’s work. The Internet not only makes such a “community of interest” or networked approach possible — including the obligations of corporate citizenship — it makes it necessary. Moreover, it could create a common collaborative space for government, industry and civil society.

A visit to state capitols can be both inspiring and informative because our forbearers took the time to etch their dreams and aspirations into stone. Just to the right of the grand staircase as you enter the Washington State legislative building, there is a statue of the northwest pioneer Marcus Whitman, below which are inscribed his words — “My plans require time and distance.” In a cramped room one floor below sit rows of servers and the legislature’s connection to the state’s fiber optic network — a digital infrastructure that collapses both time and distance. Such is the moment in time at which deliberative bodies find themselves in this new century.

Whitman and his contemporaries were architects of the original networks of government — namely, a network of county seats that were no more than a day’s ride by horse from each other. In the communities dotted between the county seats, there was more work than could be done by any individual or family acting alone. Whether raising a barn or taking off a crop, neighbors and townsfolk alike — merchants, metallurgists, preachers, and teachers — lent a hand to do what needed to be done.

You see a reflection of the historic neighbor-helping-neighbor ethic in the way we respond to disasters — natural or manmade. People helping people, organizations working together — government, private industries and civil society (the latter including community groups and not-for-profit organizations) extend the reach of the best in us to let us rise to the level of the public need.

Our response to acts of nature or acts of terrorism have brought us back to a state of interdependence. Today, it may appear random or ad hoc, but it is certainly reminiscent of the way communities worked in an earlier day. It was collaboration before collaboration was cool — and it was certainly not called that.

Communities came together out of common need for increased capacity, but it does not happen spontaneously. Such stewardship is an act of leadership. Leaders are made — and remade — through the deliberate acts of individuals at times of decision. Witness the political res-

²⁶Osborne and Hutchinson, *xiii*.

urrection of Rudy Giuliani as America's Mayor on 9-11-01, or the recreation of Jimmy Carter as elder statesman for the country and chief nail driver for Habitat for Humanity.

Indeed, the much-touted new models of collaboration in a networked world are, in many respects, a return to the analog, low-bandwidth, high-touch values on which the country was built. It brings to mind Thomas Jefferson's principled concept of citizen statesmen who come from all walks of life to work in public service, and who then return again to the farm and field. And these new networks collapse Whitman's need for time and distance. What once took a day on horseback now takes a second from the palm of your hand using handheld digital devices. And with that second taken to do the work of the day and thousands of unseen hands and newfangled brushes moving in a blur of speed in the background,

Tom would doubtlessly find endless new adventures to occupy the rest of his day.

Aunt Polly placed small trust in such evidence. She went out to see for herself; and she would have been content to find twenty percent of Tom's statement true. When she found the entire fence whitewashed, and not only white-washed but elaborately coated and recoated, and even a streak added to the ground, her astonishment was almost unspeakable.

She said: "Well, I never! There's no getting round it, you can work when you're a mind to, Tom." And then she diluted the compliment by adding, "But it's powerful seldom you're a mind to, I'm bound to say. Well, go 'long and play; but mind you get back some time in a week, or I'll tan you." *

ECLECTIC READING - BOOKS ON THE DESKS OF PUBLIC-SECTOR EXECUTIVES

Jim Collins, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* - 1st Edition, Harper Business, 1994.

Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, Harvard Business School Press, 1997.

W. Edwards Deming, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education* - 2nd Edition, MIT Press, 2000.

Peter F. Drucker, *Managing in the Next Society*, Truman Talley Books, 2002.

James R. Evans and James W. Dean, *Total Quality Management* - 3rd Edition, South-Western College Publications, 2002.

David R. Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Daniel A. Feldman, *The Handbook of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: Inspiring Others to Achieve Results, Leadership Performance Solutions*, 1999.

Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, *Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

David W. Hutton, *From Baldrige to the Bottom Line: A Road Map for Organizational Change and Improvement* - 1st Edition, American Society for Quality, 2000.

Spencer Johnson and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*, Putnam Publishing Group, 1998.

Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action*, Harvard Business School Press, 1996.

David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson, *The Price of Government: Getting the Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis*, New York: Basic Books, 2004

David Osborne and Peter Plastrik, *Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government*, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997.

David Osborne and Peter Plastrik, *The Reinventor's Fieldbook: Tools for Transforming Your Government*, Josey-Bass Books, 2000.

David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector*, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1992.

Peter S. Pandel, Robert P. Neuman and Roland R. Cavanagh, *The Six Sigma Way: How GE, Motorola, and Other Top Companies are Honing Their Performance* - 1st Edition, McGraw-Hill Trade, 2000.

Tom Peters, *Re-imagine!* - 1st Edition, DK Publishing, 2003.

Robert Slater, *Jack Welch & The G.E. Way: Management Insights and Leadership Secrets of the Legendary CEO*, McGraw-Hill Trade, 1998.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Economics of the Public Sector* - 3rd Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Dover Publications, 2002.

©2005 Center for Digital Government

a division of e.Republic, Inc.

100 Blue Ravine Road

Folsom, CA 95630

916.932.1300 phone

916.932.1470 fax

www.centerdigitalgov.com



About Center for Digital Government

The Center for Digital Government is a national research and advisory institute on information technology in state and local government.

The Center specializes in custom research, reports, online resources and publications, surveying and advisory services.

www.centerdigitalgov.com



The State Legislative Leaders Foundation is the pre-eminent organization representing all U. S. state legislative leaders and key parliamentary leaders throughout the world. Established in 1972, its mission is to serve as an educational resource for all Senate Presidents, House Speakers, Majority Leaders, Minority Leaders and Pro Tempores. This is accomplished by offering legislative leaders opportunities to participate in intense educational programs focusing on critical public policy issues and aspects of legislative leadership. Most of the Foundation's programs are conducted in partnership with leading colleges and universities. The Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.

For more information please visit the SLLF website at www.sllf.org.

BY PAUL W. TAYLOR AND RICHARD J. VARN