



# A government leadership guide to culture change

How to foster innovation and open culture in an agile government



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## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Section I: A new paradigm for change</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Figure 2. The President's Management Agenda .....	5
Understanding organizational culture .....	6
Identifying your culture .....	7
<b>Section II: Organizing for the emerging future</b> .....	<b>9</b>
The future is built on open principles .....	9
Top five tips for the shift .....	9
Setting your foundations for success .....	10
Open principles .....	11
Moving beyond command and control .....	13
Beyond motivation .....	14
<b>Section III: Workforce and work space transformation</b> .....	<b>15</b>
How to recruit and retain top talent .....	15
Connect people to your agency mission .....	16
How to close existing skill gaps .....	16
How to know when your project isn't really agile .....	18
Creating space to innovate .....	18
<b>Section IV: Resources for agile government</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Public sector resources .....	19



**Paul Smith**

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## Introduction

I have always been struck by how difficult it is to encourage IT transformation from an organizational perspective—especially in the public sector. As a long-time employee of Red Hat, a company founded on open source principles (and software), and the general manager of our public sector business, I have witnessed firsthand a tale of two cultures.

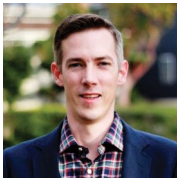
While at the office, immersed in Red Hat’s culture, I often hear an ethos for “failing fast” or “iterative improvement.” Open principles like collaboration and transparency are instilled in our day-to-day operations to ensure that the best ideas win and can be implemented quickly and effectively. In contrast, while visiting with our government customers, I too often see the struggles of our soldiers, civil servants, and contractors, each group working with noble intent to continuously improve, only to be bogged down in mountains of bureaucracy, regulation, and red tape.

Red Hatters pride themselves on being catalysts, and since 1993, our team’s job has been to become ambassadors for open source technology across government. More recently, we have become ambassadors for a new way of organizing human capital—the open organization.

In the following pages, you’ll learn about the open organization, the science of change, and how identification and adoption of open principles can help you start, accelerate, and improve the art of transformation. You’ll see how open culture and many of the agile principles known in the software development world are now being applied to create organizational change as part of the DevSecOps movement.

Here’s to collaborating to advance the future of digital government, together.

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**Michael Walker**

Global director, Open Innovation Labs,  
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“Culture” is a shared and implicit understanding among a group of people. It is the way knowledge, processes, and habits are passed from person to person. And outside of the Darwinian evolution, culture is the other important means by which humans evolve.

Culture is equally powerful in the realm of business. It can define business, and it often directly influence a business’s ability to succeed.

## What roles do leaders play?

Even though management may initially instigate cultural changes, a leader can’t simply tell employees, “Our culture is going to change today.” Certainly, modeling a desired behavior is much more effective than telling somebody what to do. However, for a group to truly adopt new behaviors, the cultural ingredients for learning and growing must be present—executives cannot expect change overnight.

In addition to leading by example, leaders can create robust systems for providing fast feedback to teams and reshaping behaviors and cultural norms. This approach involves a shift in mindset—that great ideas can come from anywhere in the company—as well as a shift in operations. People need to be in networks that are going to support innovation rather than squash it because “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” The best leaders find ways to facilitate innovation via meritocracy. They employ a system of reasoned debate, where individuals have the freedom to share ideas and measure against reality to see what works. This process of innovation trains the network to elicit and reward good ideas and good habits. In the process, it changes the company’s culture.

### Will it be easy?

No. Changing a corporate culture is extremely challenging and requires a lot of time and patience. That's because culture can feel extraordinarily nebulous. It can be slow to change. But it can be changed. By taking some initial steps—getting a handle on what culture is, how it is formed, and how to guide it in new directions—leaders can begin the process of changing their corporate cultures and setting their organizations up for a new and better future.

### What is a paradigm exactly?

A framework containing basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology commonly accepted, including a cognitive framework shared by members of any discipline or group.

Without culture change, most outcomes organizations strive for will not be realized.

## Section I: A new paradigm for change

Conversations about digital transformation and related culture change are not new. Whether described as disruption, or simply IT initiatives, we operate in a continuous cycle of change. In the private sector, this change is often clear and illustrated in the form of financial or market impacts. In the public sector, these disruptions can often be masked, but their impacts in the form of security, speed to capability, or service interruption can be found across every government organization and major agency.

In the midst of digital transformation, we engross ourselves in the efforts of innovation and disruption in the context of technology solutions. Often we miss the most crucial state—that of organizational transformation. Our efforts at organizational transformation must include going to the root of why we do what we do, which includes culture change. Without culture change, most outcomes organizations strive for will not be realized.

Research over the last decade shows this new paradigm—our way of thinking about change—is formed by three areas: **our work, the psychology of change, and the speed of change.**

### The work has changed

**What:** The old playbooks and models for management that have previously garnered success are no longer effective. The majority of tasks that these management practices were designed to manage, originally created in the 19th and 20th centuries, were rote. Efficiency was based on repetition, specification, and routine, often in the hopes of creating the largest possible output at the lowest possible cost. Today's world requires new skills, often targeted at creative differentiation with increased requirements—speed, quality, and performance outcomes. If it can be automated or outsourced, it will be. New ways of organizing and managing resources are required to lead in the digital age.

**When:** In this new world, information flows in real time, and the expectations of people have shifted too. They demand the same flow, or accessibility, of information from every encounter. This expectation puts the burden back on organizations. They must provide services to meet the people where they are—and prepare for future advancement. Citizens are placing these same demands on government services. A recent study found that 85% of people surveyed expect the same or more from government digital services compared to commercial digital services.<sup>1</sup>

*“We are in the midst of a complete transformation in the way value is created, delivered, and consumed.*

*Our ability to rapidly and effectively envision, develop, and deliver technology-related value to enhance the customer experience is becoming a key competitive differentiator.”*

Nicole Forsgren, PhD<sup>3</sup>

*“The vision for reform must be multi-generational, enabling the federal government to adapt to changing needs over time. We cannot pursue short-term fixes only to see the government quickly become outdated once again. Deep-seated transformation takes time and will not happen in one or two years.”*

President’s Management Agenda  
March 2018<sup>5</sup>

*“If we fail to adapt...at the speed of relevance, then our military forces...will lose the very technical and tactical advantage we’ve enjoyed since World War II.”*

James N. Mattis, Secretary of Defense<sup>6</sup>

**How:** Disruption itself is existential for leaders, notes an article<sup>2</sup> from professional service provider Wolters Kluwer. It’s not just an organizational design issue. It cuts straight to the core of who we are, how we see ourselves, and what we contribute to our environments. The furious pace of disruption is forcing executives to make existential decisions and commit to them much faster than they’ve anticipated.

Transforming your organizational culture—including the way you work—will require taking new approaches. If organizational culture change is not addressed alongside the introduction of technology changes, companies will not be in business much longer—regardless of how successful they have been in previous decades. There is now a sense of urgency for organizational culture change related to digital transformation and the subsequent speed of innovation. Leaders in all sectors and industries face critical decisions and challenges.

Throw out your playbooks. Revise your best practices. Innovation isn’t just a technology, it’s actually tools and people and process. It’s technological, cultural, and organizational. And in this new age, it requires a paradigm shift to compete, sustain, and thrive.

### The psychology of change

Understanding the psychology of change—how people think and interact with information presented—will provide your leaders with a broader sense of how to implement and achieve faster rates of change with ease. Working with change requires a cooperative effort between the internal self and the external data (new information) being presented. Additionally, it requires us to reframe how we think about and understand our individual relationship to change.

Neuroscientists have identified that 95% of our cognitive decision making<sup>4</sup> is done in our unconscious mind—which includes decisions, emotions, actions, and behaviors. Our unconscious mind houses our values, beliefs, and experiences. That is what pushes our cognitive decision making.

Decision making impacts how you implement change in your organization because you and your team are already hardwired to adapt rapidly. Your programming—and that of your organization—can be modified to meet the speed of innovation with minimal to moderate effort.

The following pages will help you establish a better understanding of how to work with your team as they respond to and process change—and how to simplify the process of change in your organization.

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1 Accenture, “Agile IT Delivery,” 2017. [www.nascio.org/Portals/0/Accenture\\_NASCIO\\_Agile\\_Report\\_2017\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nascio.org/Portals/0/Accenture_NASCIO_Agile_Report_2017_FINAL.pdf)

2 Wolters Kluwer, “Lessons In Leading Disruption: 2018.” [wolterskluwer.com/company/newsroom/news/2018/10/lessons-in-leading-digital-disruption.html](http://wolterskluwer.com/company/newsroom/news/2018/10/lessons-in-leading-digital-disruption.html)

3 Nicole Forsgren, PhD, “Accelerate: Building and Scaling High Performing Technology Organizations,” 2018.

4 Harvard Business School, “The Subconscious Mind,” 2003. [hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-subconscious-mind-of-the-consumer-and-how-to-reach-it](http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-subconscious-mind-of-the-consumer-and-how-to-reach-it)

5 Whitehouse.gov, “The President’s Management Agenda 2018.” [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Presidents-Management-Agenda.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Presidents-Management-Agenda.pdf)

6 Department of Defense, “DoD Cloud Strategy,” 2018. [media.defense.gov/2019/Feb/04/2002085866/-1/-1/1/DOD-CLOUD-STRATEGY.pdf](http://media.defense.gov/2019/Feb/04/2002085866/-1/-1/1/DOD-CLOUD-STRATEGY.pdf)

## Culture 101

Organizational culture is defined as how a company conducts itself internally and externally—its ethos + values + frameworks.<sup>10</sup>

It includes:

- Core values.
- Expectations for behavior.
- Decision-making models.
- Leadership structures.
- How it (the organization) conducts itself with others.
- How information flow operates.
- How one is allowed to express oneself within the organization.

Cultural identity is crucial as it affects productivity, performance, employee engagement, and customer relations.

## Action

When considering a change in your culture—teams, departments, or organization-wide—adjustments are often needed in these frequently overlooked areas:

- Policies and governance
- Processes across the entire ecosystem
- Decision-making models
- Sourcing feedback
- Talent acquisition and hiring practices

## The speed of change

We hear a lot about the speed of innovation. We talk about [planning being dead](#)<sup>7</sup>, the need for flexible business models, and building solutions with agile methods. But do we truly understand that the speed of change is on a trajectory for rapid increase?

We live in an age of innovation featuring rapid cycles of change. Futurist Gerd Leonhardt estimates we will see more change between 2015 and 2035 than in the prior 300 years of modern history.<sup>8</sup> To effectively understand this change, we need to step back and see the large-scale impact of this age.

In early 2018, a Nielsen report showed our media consumption in hours, averaging over 11 hours per day.<sup>9</sup> The amount of information we use daily, whether through our personal or professional lives, speaks to how our society has changed. As our technologies advance and alter how we work, we will alter how we provide services and solutions. Our current state is unable to keep up—and meeting the demands of the future state will be difficult.

## Understanding organizational culture

### And, why you should care.

It is time to shift our thinking from how we use technology to support our businesses to how we build technology to shape future strategies.

Disruption through digitization has altered our way of working—from business models to organizational design. There are even distinct differences in leadership structures to realize the benefits of our technological advances.

To benefit from digital disruption and gain a competitive edge, we must evolve how we are organized and how we interact with others.

Each level of management and leadership has different responsibilities for engaging with change. Those in mid-level roles need to understand how to use technologies and change at a local level. Those in senior roles must be able to see how change and technology affect strategy, the scope of business, and core capabilities. Senior leaders must make strategic decisions and create space for those in mid-level roles to act for local impact.

As a leader moving into the future, your primary directive is organizational change. Benefits of your technologies will emerge naturally when the architecture of your organization is designed on a scale of openness to support structure, process, decision making, relationship building, resource allocation, and even incentives. Continuing to only focus on digitization efforts will not lead to success and sustainability.

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<sup>7</sup> [Opensource.com](#), “Try, Learn, Modify,” 2018. [opensource.com/open-organization/18/3/try-learn-modify](#)

<sup>8</sup> Gerd Leonhard [www.futuristgerd.com/future-thinker/](#)

<sup>9</sup> Nielsen, “Time Flies,” 2018. [www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/time-flies-us-adults-now-spend-nearly-half-a-day-interacting-with-media.html](#)

<sup>10</sup> *The Open Organization Leaders Manual Second Edition*, “Stop Hiring for Culture Fit,” 2018. [opensource.com/open-organization/resources/leaders-manual](#)

## Identifying your culture

### How do you process information?

The Three Cultures Model<sup>11</sup> by Ron Westrum is a starting point to help you identify your current culture: pathological, bureaucratic, or generative.

### How do things get done in your organization?

Here are a few questions to ask your leaders and teams as you begin to assess the health of your organization:

- How do you communicate why your organization exists, where it is going, and how it is going to get there?
- How do you determine what information, skills, and work structures are needed for employees to successfully do their jobs?
- How do you support decisions being made efficiently and effectively?
- How do you focus on the needs of your internal and external stakeholders?
- What parameters are in place to allow your organization to adapt quickly and respond to shifting needs and demands?

### Three Cultures Model

By using this chart as a guide, you can begin to see your current state—and plan for a future state based on desired outcomes.

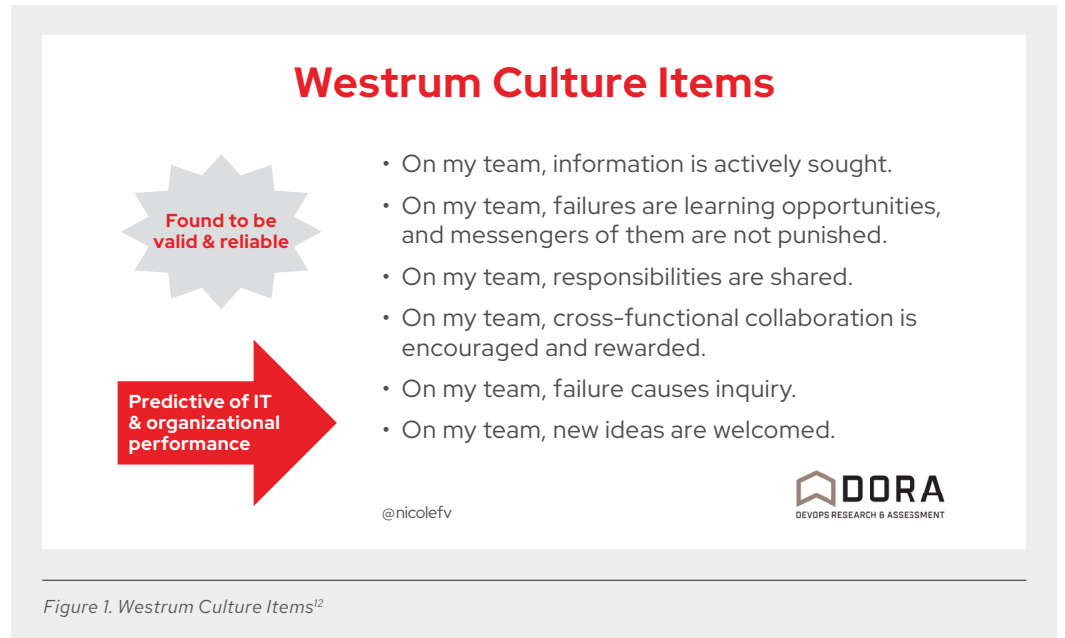
**Table 1. Three Cultures Model**

<b>Pathological (power-oriented)</b>	<b>Bureaucratic (rule-oriented)</b>	<b>Generative (performance-oriented)</b>
Low cooperation	Modest cooperation	High cooperation
Messengers shot	Messengers neglected	Messengers trained
Responsibilities shirked	Narrow responsibilities	Risks are shared
Bridging discouraged	Bridging tolerated	Bridging encouraged
Failure leads to scapegoating	Failure leads to justice	Failure leads to inquiry
Novelty crushed	Novelty leads to problems	Novelty implemented

<sup>11</sup> Ron Westrum, "A Typology of Organisational Cultures," 2004. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1765804/pdf/v013p0ii22.pdf](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1765804/pdf/v013p0ii22.pdf)

Open leadership is a solution to problems faced in how we work, build and deliver solutions and services, and make decisions and communicate.

Open leadership transforms our processes. It helps us move from a pathological or bureaucratic organization to a generative organizational model. We've made the case for culture change. Now, we must organize for open leadership.



**Westrum Culture Items**

Found to be valid & reliable

Predictive of IT & organizational performance

- On my team, information is actively sought.
- On my team, failures are learning opportunities, and messengers of them are not punished.
- On my team, responsibilities are shared.
- On my team, cross-functional collaboration is encouraged and rewarded.
- On my team, failure causes inquiry.
- On my team, new ideas are welcomed.

@nicolefv

**DORA**  
DEVOPS RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT

Figure 1. Westrum Culture Items<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> DevOps Research and Assessment, Nicole Forsgren, PhD, "What We Learned from Four Years of Sciencing The Crap out of DevOps," 2018. [www.usenix.org/sites/default/files/conference/protected-files/lisa16\\_slides\\_forsgren.pdf](http://www.usenix.org/sites/default/files/conference/protected-files/lisa16_slides_forsgren.pdf)



# Section II: Organizing for the emerging future

## The future is built on open principles

### From open initiatives to behaviors and expected outcomes.

Implementing open values, principles, and processes into all facets of our lives—such as culture (both organizational and societal), education, access to information, co-creation models, engineering, and computing—is the best way to build a balanced and free society that paves the way for future technological advances and new ways of working together to build our world.<sup>13</sup>

The world as we have known it for centuries is in a rapid state of evolution. We see it playing out on political stages, in education, and in business. Little has been left untouched by innovative solutions involving technological and scientific advances.

With this human evolution comes a desire for more change within our systems and structures. People crave authentic and honest interaction, access to transparent information, opportunities to weigh in on critical decisions, and meaningful work. What worked a decade ago is no longer viable.

Building our future, our organizations, our ecosystems, and our people will require bold shifts. It is time to examine all things open.

### Top five tips for the shift

1. Architect your organization to shape future strategies today.
2. Create space to innovate and “fail forward” safely.
3. Focus on your outcomes and be flexible in your planning to get there.
4. Enable your people and opportunities to fit what you need now so you can adapt as you move forward.
5. Just start.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Open Organization Leaders Manual Second Edition, “Introduction,” 2018.* [opensource.com/open-organization/resources/leaders-manual](https://opensource.com/open-organization/resources/leaders-manual)

## Building your foundation on open principles<sup>15</sup>

### Transparency

Access to information; communication; decision-making processes

### Adaptability

Flexible and resilient, feedback loops; safe space to iterate + try

### Inclusivity

Diverse points of view and thought; rules for participation clear; underrepresented voices heard; leaders are consciously engaged

### Collaboration

Joint work produces better; discovery of work, providing feedback + engagement is easy; internal + external participation is possible

### Community

Shared values + purpose guides work; core values are clear; drives goals; share a common language

The principles that open organizations, and teams, use to organize can be set at varying levels. Each organization takes into account what works for their industry, or their regulations. The key to making open culture work, however, is integrating all five principles.

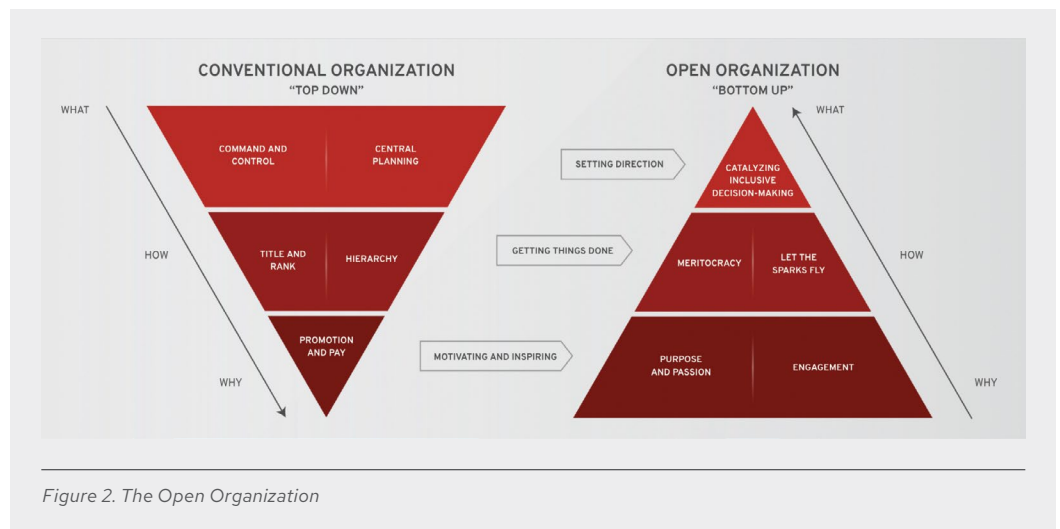
## Setting your foundations for success

### Start with the why.

Starting with “why” seems like an easy enough task as it is a seemingly innocuous question. However, it requires a far more complex answer. Knowing your why for each level of your organization will not only create meaningful work for your employees, it will steer your entire operation toward success.

In *Why Innovation Trumps Process*<sup>14</sup>, Allison Matlack asks us, “Is your organization more focused on doing things right for the sake of process and consistency, doing things fast to meet arbitrary deadlines, or on doing the right thing for the customer? And what’s that right balance of each of those for you?” Before concentrating on what you do and how you do it, you should figure out why you’re doing it in the first place.

Use these two examples to expand understanding into your why to strengthen your agency mission and engage your people.



<sup>14</sup> *The Open Organization Guide to IT Culture Change*, “Why Innovation Trumps Process,” 2017.

## Open principles

### Adjusting to your needs.

When leaders hear the phrase open organization, it often causes confusion. The assumption is that an organization is either fully “open” or fully “closed.” Open organizational cultures vary widely, but all are intentional and structured.

Each organization and industry will find itself being guided by goals, mission, culture, and regulations. The influencers of an organization’s behaviors and business models allow for the individual levers—open principles—to be adjusted. Organizations then must operate within a spectrum of openness, allowing for adjustment by each guiding principle.

The crucial component to organizing in this way is that all five principles should be part of your foundation.

### Let’s examine the principles and how they look operationalized.<sup>15</sup>

#### Principle: Transparency

##### Operationalized:

Everyone working on a project or initiative has access to all pertinent materials.

People willingly disclose their work, invite participation on projects before those projects are complete, and respond positively to requests for additional details.

People affected by decisions can access and review the processes and conversations that lead to those decisions, and they can respond to them.

##### Incorporating open principles:

While you need to consider regulations and policies that affect your industry, you can create a transparent flow of information within your organization and provide appropriate levels of access to information.

#### Principle: Inclusivity

##### Operationalized:

Technical channels and social norms for encouraging diverse points of view are well-established and obvious.

The organization features multiple channels and methods for receiving feedback to accommodate people’s preferences.

Leaders are conscious of voices not present in dialog and actively seek to include or incorporate them.

##### Incorporating open principles:

Build teams who represent cognitive diversity, varied backgrounds, and varied sets of experiences to solve problems in innovative and competitive ways.

#### Principle: Adaptability

##### Operationalized:

Feedback mechanisms allow and encourage peers to assist each other without managerial oversight.

Leaders work to ensure that feedback loops genuinely and materially impact how people in the organization operate.

People are not afraid to make mistakes, yet projects and teams are comfortable adapting their pre-existing work to project-specific contexts to avoid repeated failures.

##### Incorporating open principles:

Create space for innovation in your teams while removing barriers to information. With supporting documentation on decision-making frameworks, your people become engaged and adaptable at every turn.

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<sup>15</sup> [opensource.com](https://opensource.com/open-organization/resources/open-org-maturity-model), “The Open Organization Maturity Model,” 2017. [opensource.com/open-organization/resources/open-org-maturity-model](https://opensource.com/open-organization/resources/open-org-maturity-model)

**Principle: Collaboration****Operationalized:**

People tend to begin work collaboratively, rather than add collaboration after they've each completed individual components of work.

Work produced collaboratively is available externally for creators outside the organization to use in potentially unforeseen ways.

People can discover, provide feedback on, and join work in progress easily—and are welcomed to do so.

**Incorporating open principles:**

Provide your teams ways of working together and across departments to solve issues. Even if you can't collaborate externally, internal collaboration can create rapid change and spur innovative solutions.

**Principle: Community****Operationalized:**

Shared values and principles inform decision-making and assessment processes are clear and obvious to members.

Leaders mentor others and demonstrate strong accountability to the group by modeling shared values and principles.

People have a common language and work together to ensure that ideas are clearly communicated and they are comfortable sharing their knowledge and stories to further the group's work.

**Incorporating open principles:**

Connect your people internally with a shared vision and common language. If you can go one step further and build community externally, it will bring long term success.

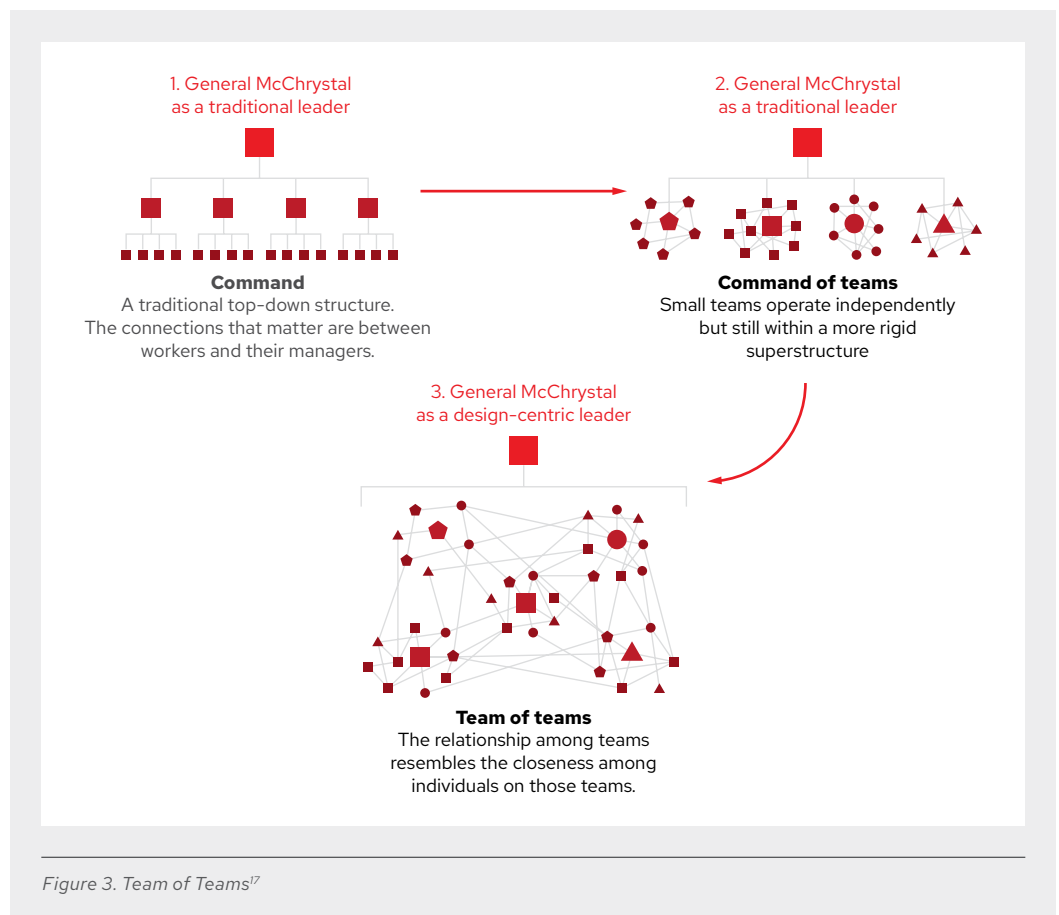
## Moving beyond command and control

### Reframing your culture.

Team of Teams<sup>16</sup> models have emerged in organizations over the last few years. In 2015, retired U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal published a book by this very name. Many organizations are adopting these models of cross-organizational and cross-functional teams, viewing it as an essential part of serving clients' needs.

Ultimately, a Team of Teams model creates higher productivity and engagement, deeper leadership development, and utility players across your organization who become rapid responders to change. By design, cross-functional teams have access and connection to the rest of the business and are situationally aware of how their efforts can impact or impede the rest.

Using the traditional organizational chart allows for scalable efficiency—doing things right—while a distributed Team of Teams model allows for scalable adaptability and empowered execution—doing the right thing. This helps change to spread and scale.



<sup>16</sup> General Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, 2015.

### Six insights for open leaders to inspire teams<sup>18</sup>

**Willingness** to extend trust and share information.

**Appreciation** for transparency and collaboration.

**Sensitivity** to the moods, emotions, and passions of the people that make up the organization.

**Knowledge** of not only what to share, but how to share it.

**Belief** that groups will consistently outperform individuals working in isolation.

**Trust** in those groups to create necessary change.

### Beyond motivation

#### Inspiration through open leadership.

In *Organize for Innovation*,<sup>17</sup> Jim Whitehurst, president and CEO of Red Hat, writes that being an open leader means creating the context others need to do their best work. In setting that context, leaders create places of trust and rely heavily on their emotional quotient to connect and build relationships.

Open leadership requires moving beyond motivation to inspire people. Inspiration allows others to connect, dig deep to innovate, and do meaningful work. Open leaders set the vision for the business and communicate and inspire from the top. But, it is from within the organization that innovation and ideas are encouraged and fostered.

Inspiration is intrinsic. It does not come from a place of fear or control, which is often the force behind motivation. Inspiration allows for an individual to connect to who they are and the ability to serve others. An open leader facilitates this experience for those they lead. This is the basis for building collaborative relationships.

By connecting people to a shared vision versus mission statements, we begin to promote the capacity to dream, and ultimately, create cultures of innovation.

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<sup>17</sup> Jim Whitehurst, *Organize for Innovation: Rethinking How We Work*, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Opensource.com, "What it means to be an open source leader," 2016. [opensource.com/open-organization/16/3/what-it-means-be-open-source-leader](https://opensource.com/open-organization/16/3/what-it-means-be-open-source-leader)

# Section III: Workforce and work space transformation

## How to recruit and retain top talent

### Moving beyond the talent challenges of the public sector.

When talking about retaining talent, Michael Conlin, chief data officer at the Pentagon, said, “In my opinion [talent] is absolutely the biggest single challenge.”<sup>19</sup> Conlin went on to list several barriers to attracting top talent, including a lack of career paths and private sector salaries.

Additionally, within the public sector, the IT workforce grew significantly from 2007 to 2017, expanding from approximately 65,200 to more than 84,000.<sup>20</sup> And with this increase, the age gap has widened to 4.5 IT specialists age 60-plus per employee under 30.<sup>21</sup>

While these challenges seem daunting, there are simple tactics to attract and recruit top talent in this generation. The value of solving problems over performing routine tasks, for example, creates meaningful and engaging work. This ability can be far more alluring to young talent than a compensation package.

Additionally, to attract young, engaged talent you must be cognizant of the environments you create. Going back to knowing your culture—ethos and way of doing things, along with open principles—can help you shape the right environment. Transparency, access to information, and communication should be a top priority when addressing transformation in other areas. These desires are common outside of the workplace and are demands in the workplace for today’s modern, intergenerational workforce.

### Ways to attract top talent

- Create short-term project sprints.
- Connect people to your agency mission, your why, and problems to be solved.
- Use the experienced talent you have in surplus to mentor on management and leading teams.
- Allow for cross-collaboration efforts in your teams when career paths are yet undefined to keep talent interested.
- Be inclusive in your sourcing—look for diverse backgrounds as heterogeneous teams boost performance.<sup>21</sup>
- Use hiring incentives to provide more opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fed Scoop, “DOD’s New Chief Data Officer Says Talent Is The ‘Biggest Single Challenge,’” 2018. [www.fedscoop.com/interview-michael-conlin-talent-challenge/](http://www.fedscoop.com/interview-michael-conlin-talent-challenge/)

<sup>20</sup> Nextgov, “The Government’s Struggle To Hire Young Tech Talent Is Worse Than You Thought,” 2017. [www.nextgov.com/cio-briefing/2017/12/governments-struggle-hire-young-tech-talent-worse-you-thought/144225/](http://www.nextgov.com/cio-briefing/2017/12/governments-struggle-hire-young-tech-talent-worse-you-thought/144225/)

<sup>21</sup> Kellogg Insight, “Better Decisions Through Diversity,” 2010. [insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better\\_decisions\\_through\\_diversity](http://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better_decisions_through_diversity)

<sup>22</sup> Federal News Network, “Agencies Have 7 Different Ways To Recruit & Retain,” 2017. [federalnewsnetwork.com/all-news/2017/12/agencies-have-7-different-ways-to-recruit-and-retain-mission-critical-talent-but-they-rarely-use-them](http://federalnewsnetwork.com/all-news/2017/12/agencies-have-7-different-ways-to-recruit-and-retain-mission-critical-talent-but-they-rarely-use-them)

## Connect people to your agency mission

### Use your mission to grow and sustain your capabilities.

People connect to dreams. Over the last half-century, we have gained insight into how to measure, quantify, and analyze—yet in doing so, we suppress the importance of having a dream. We are all inspired by transformative movements and potential greatness. When we look to define a dream in our organization, we start with a unique vision shared by a group of people and then infuse a team with that shared vision. Each initiative in our organizations can be connected to a dream—a shared vision or desired outcome—for a community to be inspired by and to pursue together.

Every agency has a distinct mission for its existence. Having a clear, simple directive, whether recruiting new talent or retaining your current employees, will help each individual and team align to a greater purpose.

One key action—become storytellers of your agency. Share your experiences, the work you do, and how that work impacts those you employ, as well as those you serve. Storytelling should be both an internal and external action to connect to the mission, engage, and attract talent.

### Connecting your people to your mission

**Know your audience:** Take the time to understand your people and teams—what they connect to, what they want to achieve, and what they care about.

**Make it relevant:** Explain the vision, why it matters, and how their work contributes to the realization of the vision.

**Create meaningful relationships and experiences:** To find inspiration with a mission, start with an individual's connection to it and the people they work with to accomplish it.

**Reinforce daily:** Emphasize the why through communication and behavior modeling to keep the mission and vision front and center for all to use as a guide.

### How to close existing skill gaps

#### Inclusively source. Build, don't buy. Seek out "learning agile" people.

#### Build, don't buy.

There are two approaches to this method—develop internally and source potential. Companies who gain the competitive edge understand that it starts with knowing what they need to do to serve their customers. With this clarity, they act swiftly to bring in the right problem solvers to build solutions—or a service—for customers. To act fast, they must know that they have the right teams available to achieve these goals.

What does this approach look like? Top consultancies, for example, build talent when they are on the bench.<sup>23</sup> When not assigned to a project, you will find these employees learning a new set of competencies. Those skills may be trained through a learning module or by assignment to a cross-functional team for hands-on development. Employees also become active in their own development. They seek out new areas of interest to learn and do not wait for a quarterly training day. Space is created for continuous learning and development. The differentiator is sourcing potential—not always going for the A-list recruit but rather looking for growth potential.

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<sup>23</sup> Opensource.com, "Reconsidering Culture Fit," 2018. [opensource.com/open-organization/18/10/reconsider-culture-fit](https://opensource.com/open-organization/18/10/reconsider-culture-fit)



### Be inclusive in your sourcing.

Becoming a dynamic, inclusive organization requires an organizational culture built on open principles. Only true diversity of thought can produce innovations at the level required to thrive today.

Building teams based on “fit” can actually create exclusive tribalism rather than what we actually intend: a sense of belonging. Employing hiring practices that seek talent from one primary background or educational institution will create exclusive environments that lack diversity of thought, even though they might represent good “culture fit.”

We want to have people from different walks of life, with different backgrounds, and with different mindsets, so we can collaborate and create unique solutions. Organizations should have no place for a “them versus us” mentality. Doing better together takes a variety of perspectives and experiences.

After a nine-month field study that was published in the *American Sociological Review*, Lauren Rivera, associate professor at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, concluded that when hiring managers talk about “fit,” they focus on things like hobbies and biographies. Rivera stated in her report, “In many respects, [hiring managers] hired in a manner more closely resembling the choice of friends or romantic partners.”<sup>24</sup>

The tech world has become obsessed with hiring for culture fit,<sup>25</sup> and has done itself (and the entire organizational ecosystem) a disservice as it has fed a growing diversity problem. For open ecosystems—communities and other organizations—to stay true to their values, building heterogeneous teams can boost performance,<sup>26</sup> new ideas, and gain an advantage.

### Source the learning agile

Learning agility is a unique position that anyone can take, however, it has previously been dismissed as a skill that one would hire for. It is the chosen ability to adapt to situations and apply knowledge from prior experience even when you don’t know what to do. It is a willingness to learn from all of your experiences and then apply that in new situations.

A 2013 *Forbes* article on The Five Dimensions of Learning Agility reported:<sup>27</sup>

“Learning agility is a key to unlocking our adaptation proficiency. It is a reliable indicator of leadership potential because learning agile people ‘excel at absorbing information from their experience and then extrapolating from those to navigate unfamiliar situations.’ In short, learning agility is the ability to learn, adapt, and apply ourselves in constantly morphing conditions.”

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<sup>24</sup> *American Sociological Review*, “Hiring as Culture Matching,” 2012. [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122412463213](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122412463213)

<sup>25</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, “Tech’s Obsession with Culture Fit,” 2018. [www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/techs-obsession-with-cultural-fit-feeds-its-diversity-problem/article37684343/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/techs-obsession-with-cultural-fit-feeds-its-diversity-problem/article37684343/)

<sup>26</sup> *Kellogg Insights*, “Better Decisions Through Diversity,” 2010. [insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better\\_decisions\\_through\\_diversity](http://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better_decisions_through_diversity)

<sup>27</sup> *Forbes*, “The Five Dimensions of Learning Agility,” 2013. [www.forbes.com/sites/kevincashman/2013/04/03/the-five-dimensions-of-learning-agile-leaders/#6e32b6047457](http://www.forbes.com/sites/kevincashman/2013/04/03/the-five-dimensions-of-learning-agile-leaders/#6e32b6047457)

## How to know when your project isn't really agile

Knowing what not to do is often as important as knowing the right approach. The Defense Innovation Board lists these warning signs to consider when trying to deploy agile methodologies.<sup>28</sup>

Key flags that a project is not really agile:

- Nobody on the software development team is talking with and observing the users of the software in action; we mean the actual users of the actual code.
- Continuous feedback from users to the development team (bug reports, users assessments) is not available. Talking once at the beginning of a program to verify requirements doesn't count!
- Meeting requirements is treated as more important than getting something useful into the field as quickly as possible.
- Stakeholders (development, test, ops, security, contracting, contractors, end-users, etc.) are acting more-or-less autonomously (e.g. 'it's not my job.')
- End users of the software are missing-in-action throughout development; at a minimum they should be present during Release Planning and User Acceptance Testing.
- DevSecOps culture is lacking if manual processes are tolerated when such processes can and should be automated (e.g. automated testing, continuous integration, continuous delivery.)"

Note: While targeted at software development, these warnings are also relevant to agile organizations.

## Creating space to innovate

Many leaders understand the importance of addressing cultural change and process shift alongside the introduction of emerging technologies to digitally transform, but struggle with the right way to get started.

Red Hat® Open Innovation Labs [[red.ht/labs](https://red.ht/labs)] is a catalyst designed to do just that. Open Innovation Labs is an immersive residency that puts open source tools, open culture, and modern methods to work. Customer teams, comprised of IT and the business, collaborate and align on a real business need, develop an application prototype to meet that need, and immerse themselves in a new way of working to deliver more value to the business. Open Innovation Labs is an opportunity for teams to experiment with modern application tools, open methods, and open culture in a proven and secure environment to catalyze innovation to the business.

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<sup>28</sup> Defense Innovation Board, "Detecting Agile BS," 2018. [media.defense.gov/2018/Oct/09/2002049591/-1/-1/0/DIB\\_DETECTING\\_AGILE\\_BS\\_2018.10.05.pdf](https://media.defense.gov/2018/Oct/09/2002049591/-1/-1/0/DIB_DETECTING_AGILE_BS_2018.10.05.pdf)

# Section IV: Resources for agile government

Agencies have many resources available to help them become more agile and attract top talent. Here are some references to help you get started:

## Open organization resources

Find open organization resources and *The Open Organization* book series at [opensource.com/open-organization](https://opensource.com/open-organization).

Find modern practices in the Open Practice Library: [openpracticelibrary.com](https://openpracticelibrary.com)

Visit The Enterprisers Project, a community of CIOs discussing the future of business and IT, at [enterpriseproject.com](https://enterpriseproject.com).

## Public sector resources

Read the President's Management Agenda (2018) at [Whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).<sup>29</sup>

View the Digital Services Playbook<sup>30</sup> and the TechFAR Handbook<sup>31</sup> at [CIO.gov](https://cio.gov).

Visit the Centers of Excellence<sup>32</sup> for IT Modernization at [GSA.gov](https://gsa.gov).

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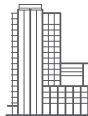
<sup>29</sup> *The President's Management Agenda, 2018.* [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Presidents-Management-Agenda.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Presidents-Management-Agenda.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> *CIO.gov, "Digital Services Playbook"* [playbook.cio.gov/](https://playbook.cio.gov/)

<sup>31</sup> *CIO.gov, "TechFAR Handbook"* [techfarhub.cio.gov/handbook/](https://techfarhub.cio.gov/handbook/)

<sup>32</sup> *Centers of Excellence* [coe.gsa.gov/](https://coe.gsa.gov/)

## About Red Hat



Red Hat is the world's leading provider of enterprise open source software solutions, using a community-powered approach to deliver reliable and high-performing Linux, hybrid cloud, container, and Kubernetes technologies. Red Hat helps customers integrate new and existing IT applications, develop cloud-native applications, standardize on our industry-leading operating system, and automate, secure, and manage complex environments. Award-winning support, training, and consulting services make Red Hat a trusted adviser to the Fortune 500. As a strategic partner to cloud providers, system integrators, application vendors, customers, and open source communities, Red Hat can help organizations prepare for the digital future.



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